

**THE ETHNIC TURN:
STUDIES IN POLITICAL CINEMA FROM BRAZIL AND THE UNITED STATES, 1960-2002**

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What makes political cinema *political*? It used to be that the category of political cinema was understood to designate a body of work with a very determinate political orientation. When Comolli and Narboni wrote about political cinema in the late 1960s, they were writing about a cinematic practice defined by its opposition to the capitalist status quo and aiming at the transformation of the social world. But as Marxism has suffered a crisis over the last decades, so has the concept of a political cinema, which has since lost its specificity. I claim that since the late sixties there has been a shift in ideas and practices concerning political cinema: a class-oriented, anti-capitalist conception of politics has given way to a conception of politics that is primarily, though not exclusively, identity-oriented. I call this shift the ethnic turn in political cinema. The ethnic turn has not received much critical scrutiny from film scholars. It tends to be taken for granted as an advance in our thinking about society and a triumph in the fight against racism and Eurocentrism. The aim of my dissertation is to challenge this complacency by asking how ethnicity is constructed—by whom, to the exclusion of what, for what purpose, and why now.

Using case studies from Brazil and the United States, I examine the uses of racial and ethnic representation in explicitly political film over the last half century. Both nation-states have inherited a comparable history of African slavery, indigenous genocide, and formidable European immigration. But so far, there has been little comparative work examining the ways in which explicitly political films in these two countries have tried to make sense of racial oppression, how these representations have changed over time, and what those changes indicate about the shifting terms of both national and global debates over increasing social inequality. My dissertation addresses this lacuna.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>PREFACE</u>	VIII
1.0 <u>INTRODUCTION</u>	1
2.0 <u>QUILOMBO AND UTOPIA, PART ONE: FROM MARXIST HISTORIOGRAPHY TO BRAZILIAN NATIONAL HOLIDAY</u>	25
3.0 <u>QUILOMBO AND UTOPIA, PART TWO: FROM THE AESTHETIC OF LABOR TO <i>QUILOMBISMO</i></u>	85
4.0 <u><i>BUSH MAMA: A CULTURALIST HEIR OF LATIN AMERICAN THIRD CINEMA</i></u>	144
5.0 <u><i>THE PRICE OF HEAVEN: REMAKING POLITICS IN ALL THAT HEAVEN ALLOWS, ALI: FEAR EATS THE SOUL, AND FAR FROM HEAVEN</i></u>	194
<u>BIBLIOGRAPHY</u>	238

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure 1.</u> The Road to Palmares. <i>Ganga Zumba</i> (Diegues, 1963)	63
<u>Figure 2.</u> Antão's Call to Action. <i>Ganga Zumba</i> (Diegues, 1963)	66
<u>Figure 3.</u> A Spatialized Palmares. <i>Quilombo</i> (Diegues, 1984).....	72
<u>Figure 4.</u> New World Paradise. <i>Quilombo</i> (Diegues, 1984)	77
<u>Figure 5.</u> Twenty-nine shot fragment from ceramic sequence. <i>Aruanda</i> (Noronha, 1960)	101
<u>Figure 6.</u> Drying Ceramics. <i>Aruanda</i> (Noronha, 1960)	112
<u>Figure 7.</u> Bolandeira at Work. (Left) still from <i>A Bolandeira</i> (Vladimir Carvalho, 1967).	115
<u>Figure 8.</u> Water-driven Sugar Mill in Pernambuco, Brazil; painting by Frans Post, 1647	116
<u>Figure 9.</u> Casa de Fazenda em Pernambuco. Painting by Frans Post.	117
<u>Figure 10.</u> Plantation Mill Yard and Sugar Mill. Watercolor by Johann Moritz Rugendas.....	117
<u>Figure 11.</u> Sugar Production, Brazil.....	118
<u>Figure 12.</u> Sugar Mill, Brazil. Sugar Mill, Brazil.....	118
<u>Figure 13.</u> Map of Olinda, Pernambuco.	119
<u>Figure 14.</u> Sugar Refining Process.....	120
<u>Figure 15.</u> Selling rapadura at market. The last shot of <i>A Bolandeira</i> (1967).....	124
<u>Figure 16.</u> Quince Marmalade Drying in the Sun, still from <i>Quilombo</i> (Carvalho, 1975)	131
<u>Figure 17.</u> Production Process. <i>Quilombo</i> (Carvalho, 1975).....	133
<u>Figure 18.</u> Opening image and background for the credit sequence. <i>Quilombo</i> (Carvalho, 1975)	134
<u>Figure 19.</u> Dorothy (Barabara O. Jones) killing the police officer (Chris Clay). <i>Bush Mama</i> (1976)..	169
<u>Figure 20.</u> Dorothy and the MPLA fighter make eye contact. <i>Bush Mama</i> (1976)	171
<u>Figure 21.</u> The last shot of <i>Bush Mama</i> (1976)	171

<u>Figure 22.</u> Wig Signage. <i>Bush Mama</i> (1976)	177
<u>Figure 23.</u> Freeze framed image ends the credit sequence of <i>Memorias</i> (1968)	191
<u>Figure 24.</u> <i>Memorias</i> (1968) Film Poster	192
<u>Figure 25.</u> Cary (Jane Wyman) reads from Henry David Thoreau's <i>Walden</i>	204
<u>Figure 26.</u> Cary (Jane Wyman) is introduced to Ron's (Rock Hudson) friends	208
<u>Figure 27.</u> The scene that separates the two parts of <i>Ali: Fear Eats the Soul</i> (1974):.....	211
<u>Figure 28.</u> Repetition with a difference. <i>Ali: Fear Eats the Soul</i> (1974)	215
<u>Figure 29.</u> "Overdetermination from without." <i>Far from Heaven</i> (Focus Features, 2002).	225
<u>Figure 30.</u> Neither black nor white. <i>Far from Heaven</i> (Focus Features, 2002).	228

PREFACE

I would like to thank my dissertation committee for their patience and encouragement these last many years. Marcia Landy, Shalini Puri, Adam Lowenstein, Neepta Majumdar, and John Beverley have provided support and inspiration. Each in her or his own way has nurtured what is good in the project and gently steered me away from blind alleys. I am grateful for their straight-talk and for their anti-bureaucratic approach to graduate study. I only hope to one day emulate their rigorously intellectual, yet pretenseless, mentoring.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

1. *The Ethnic Turn*

Racism isn't what it used to be. In a recent special PMLA issue dedicated to looking at "the state of the study of race in literary studies," several of the contributors prefaced their comments with an acknowledgement of the changed racial landscape. Arif Dirlik, noting the ongoing pervasiveness of race talk and the Obama phenomenon, concludes, "Racism may not be dead, but it is not the racism of old either: So how do we talk about it?"¹ Étienne Balibar begins his contribution with a series of questions, "Why do we call certain attitudes, both individual and collective, racist? Why do we list certain discourses—admittedly a very wide range of discourses, which single out, stigmatize, threaten, or discriminate against various human and social groups—racist?"² We know where this is going. Balibar concludes that "we have reached a point of extreme confusion, in the use of the category of racism."³ Nowhere was this confusion more on display than during the 2001 "World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance" held in Durban. The conference broke down over Zionism as racism and over the question of reparations for the victims of European colonialism. Balibar argued that the episode "signals the urgent necessity to question afresh what exactly we call racism, why we do so, and what kind of political and intellectual tradition we are continuing by using this terminology."⁴ David Theo Goldberg argues that the neoliberal state, by protecting the private sphere from state incursion, has in effect secured a private space for the free expression of (racial) preferences and practices of exclusion. The neoliberal state, "given the regime of equality before the law" and "government-protected rights," no longer can be "seen to engage in or to license racially discriminatory

¹ Arif Dirlik, "Race Talk, Race, and Contemporary Racism," *PMLA* 123.5 (2008): 1363.

² Étienne Balibar, "Racism Revisited: Sources, Relevance, and Aporias of a Modern Concept," *Ibid.*: 1630.

³ *Ibid.*: 1631.

⁴ *Ibid.*: 1632.

acts with respect to its own citizens or legitimate residents.”⁵ “Devoid of race in the public sphere, racism—as modes of racially driven subjection and exclusion, debilitation and humiliation, preference satisfaction and privilege expansion—is freed to circulate as vigorously as individuals or nongovernment...institutions choose in private.”⁶ Thus, “As the analytic and critical terms of articulation are dimmed, deleted, distorted, and redirected, the conditions once referenced by ‘racism’ have not disappeared but have assumed new form and taken on new significance in novel social conditions.”⁷ We live, as far as Goldberg is concerned, in a world of “racisms without racism.”⁸

As far as these commentators are concerned, something historically new in the way of racism—its definition, its manifestations, its transformations—is afoot that we do not yet fully understand, caught as we are between old paradigms and new social conditions. Referring in particular to the United States context, I would like to rehearse—in admittedly crude terms—four features of this new racial landscape. First, it is clear that according to many indices of well-being (i.e. incarceration rates, disease rates, poverty rates, high school dropout rates, health insurance rates, etc.) African Americans and Latinos are faring far worse than their white counterparts.⁹ The facts underscore the existence of a virulent racialized inequality. Second, this racialized inequality is combined with the election of an African American president, a growing black middle class, a formidable black presence in the virtual world of the media and advertising. To judge from this media image world, the United States—unlike a few decades ago and unlike in Brazil (which is still fighting to get people of color on the television screen)—is an astonishingly diverse, racially heterogeneous place. Third, racist discourse in the public sphere is banned, and there is much pundit energy expended to police this ban. This is a good thing. And some scholars have argued that it has been accompanied by documented changes in American (out-loud) racial attitudes. Anti-racism is popular and mainstream. The argument is that it is not merely the case that political correctness has effectively policed public discourse, rather, white people’s actual

⁵ David Theo Goldberg, “Racisms without Racism,” Ibid.: 1713.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.: 1714.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ For relevant comparative statistics, see *The Journal of Blacks in Higher Education*. Issues 49 through 62 contain statistics.

racial attitudes have changed.¹⁰ Fourth, the embrace of “diversity” has become a principle of modern American life. The celebration of cultures, cultural difference, and cultural equality is part of mainstream opinion.¹¹

The commentators who have tried to analyze these seemingly contradictory appearances of quotidian life have turned to different explanatory models. Some, like David Theo Goldberg, have termed the moment an era of “racisms without racism” to suggest the way in which the exclusions that persist in the private sphere make no explicit mention of race, instead achieving racialized preferences by taking advantage of *de facto* segregation, etc.¹² Others, like the sociologist Bonilla-Silva and the law professor Richard Thompson Ford, have described the present conjuncture as an era of “racism without racists”—that is, profound racial inequality without the overt, individual racism that characterized Jim Crow white supremacy. They have tried to broaden the concept of racism from merely denoting individual prejudicial acts or *de jure* state discrimination to denoting a structural, agentless phenomenon that, nonetheless, produces racialized results.¹³

Others, like George Fredrickson, have argued that racism—which he understands to apply only “when one ethnic group or historical collectivity dominates, excludes, or seeks to eliminate another on the basis of differences it believes are hereditary and unalterable”¹⁴—has a definitive historical arc. It does not emerge until the eighteenth century with “the rejection of hierarchy as the governing principle of social and political life” and the advent of scientific racism.¹⁵ Racism achieves its essential expression in the “overtly racist regimes” of the Jim Crow United States, apartheid South Africa, and Nazi Germany, and currently in decline in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Nonetheless, Fredrickson would like to delimit the definition of “racism” to biological determinism and thus insist on its difference from xenophobia,

¹⁰ See Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, Racism without Racists : Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States, 2nd ed. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006).

¹¹ See Walter Benn Michaels, The Trouble with Diversity : How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality, 1st ed. (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2006).

¹² See David Theo Goldberg, “Racisms without Racism,” PMLA 123.5 (2008); David Theo Goldberg, The Racial State (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2002).

¹³ See Bonilla-Silva, Racism without Racists : Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States; Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era (Boulder, Colo.: L. Rienner, 2001); Richard T. Ford, The Race Card : How Bluffing About Bias Makes Race Relations Worse, 1st ed. (New York: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2008).

¹⁴ George M. Fredrickson, Racism : A Short History (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002) 170.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* 47.

religious persecution, and culturalism, even when the latter “reifies and essentializes culture rather than genetic endowment, or ... does the work of race.”¹⁶

If, struck by the confusion over the term “racism,” Fredrickson attempts to bring some specificity to its usage, English professor Walter Benn Michaels grants the narrower definition but wants, ultimately, to read the confusion over racism symptomatically. In a controversial text written for a popular audience, *The Trouble with Diversity, or How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality*, Benn Michaels targets liberal multiculturalism. Playing little attention to the racialized character of the inequality he points to (though he certainly mentions it), Benn Michaels acknowledges the waning of discrimination (the demise of the “the racist”) as did Bonilla-Silva and Fredrickson in order to render more problematic its celebrity in left public discourse: “Why, in a world where most of us are not racist (where, on the humanities faculty at our universities, we might more plausibly say not that racism is rare but that it is extinct, do we take so much pleasure in reading attacks on racism?”¹⁷ He polemically argues that “the American love affair with race—especially when you can dress race up as culture—has continued and intensified”¹⁸ because so long as the victim of discrimination can remain the “exemplary instance of victimization in modern American political life,”¹⁹ the liberal state remains perfectible. The decline of discrimination is thus inversely tied to the love affair with race: the less discrimination plays a role in racial inequality, the more its role must be declared in order to safeguard the illusion that liberalism, with greater diligence and effort, can achieve social justice. In this light, antiracism frenzies take on new resonance: “The left, as we have already had occasion to remark, insists on giving poor people identities; it turns them into black people or Latinos or women and treats them as victims of discrimination as if in a world without discrimination, inequality would disappear. The debate we might have about inequality thus becomes a debate instead about prejudice and respect, and—since no one’s defending prejudice and no one’s attacking respect—we end up having no debate at all.”²⁰ If Benn Michaels begins from the same premise as Bonilla-Silva—we live in a time without racists—he ultimately departs from

¹⁶ Ibid. 141.

¹⁷ Michaels, *The Trouble with Diversity : How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality* 73.

¹⁸ Ibid. 7.

¹⁹ Ibid. 67.

²⁰ Ibid. 173.

Bonilla-Silva in restricting his use of the word “racism” to mean something on the order of discrimination. In other words, “racism” is not the same as “racialized inequality.” Meanwhile, for Bonilla-Silva, “racialized inequality” is a kind of “racism.” Still unlike rightwing commentators, Benn Michaels does not deny the existence of discriminatory acts or the existence of racialized inequality or that inequality is problem; he just does not seem to think that racialized inequality owes to racism, narrowly construed. Unlike Bonilla-Silva, racialized inequality does not owe to structural racism (a “racism without racists”), rather, it owes to liberal capitalism. These writers are ultimately focused on different targets. While Bonilla-Silva wants to explain the anomalous character of this “new racism,” Benn Michaels wants to detail another feature of its anomalousness: namely, that when you think you’re fighting it most—when you commit single-mindedly to antiracism—you are actually undermining your own efforts to fight for social justice. The ideological work done by racism to obscure shared class interests at a past historical moment is now, today, in our historical moment, being done by antiracism.²¹

Benn Michaels closely links the antiracism fight to the embrace of culture. If racism is tied to discrimination and discrimination to the intolerance of difference, then the solution is diversity elevated to a principle of justice. We need more tolerance of all difference—racial and sexual. And since we know that these differences are actually socially and culturally constructed, more than anything we need tolerance of cultural difference. Benn Michaels’s analysis of the state of the academic (especially) discourse follows from Slavoj Zizek’s thoroughgoing critique of multiculturalism.²² Zizek notes an “ethnicization of the national,” which is not, in his view, a regression to “primordial forms of identification with organic community” as some scholars would have it; rather, this “renewed search for (or reconstitution of) ‘ethnic roots’” is the form of appearance of the exact opposite:²³

The conclusion to be drawn is thus that the problematic of multiculturalism—the hybrid coexistence of diverse cultural life-worlds—which imposes itself today is the form of

²¹ Ibid. 79.

²² See Walter Benn Michaels, *The Shape of the Signifier: 1967 to the End of History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University, 2004).

²³ Slavoj Zizek, “Multiculturalism, or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism,” *New Left Review* 1/225, September-October (1997): 42.

appearance of its opposite, of the massive presence of capitalism as *universal* world system: it bears witness to the unprecedented homogenization of the contemporary world. It is effectively as if, since the horizon of social imagination no longer allows us to entertain the idea of an eventual demise of capitalism—since, as we might put it, everybody silently accepts that *capitalism is here to stay*—critical energy has found a substitute outlet in fighting for cultural differences which leave the basic homogeneity intact. So we are fighting our PC battles for the rights of ethnic minorities, of gays and lesbians, of different life-styles, and so on, while capitalism pursues its triumphant march—and today’s critical theory...is doing the ultimate service to the unrestrained development of capitalism by actively participating in the ideological effort to render its massive presence invisible.²⁴

These various efforts to come to terms with the present racial conjuncture all proceed from two shared basic convictions: first, that there has been an actual shift, a transformation, in the racial landscape; and second, that an important feature of that shift has to do with discursive representation. In other words, a crucial dimension of the present era—that did not apply to previous historical moments characterized by the hegemony of scientific racism or Nazism or Jim Crow white supremacy—is the widening gap between appearances and reality, and the concomitant failures of “our talk” to grasp that gap or its significance. So that, when Benn Michaels writes “the end of the Cold War and what’s now described as globalization (i.e. the penetration of capitalism into every part of the world) seem[s] to be going hand in hand with an increasingly passionate commitment to culture,”²⁵—he is characterizing an actual shift in the landscape: globalization. But when he writes, “We might even say that this insistence on organizing the world around who we are rather than around what we have or what we believe is one of the defining features of globalization, of a post-Cold War world in which people who used to think of themselves as having an ideology—either capitalist or socialist—now think of themselves above as having an identity: national, ethnic, cultural, whatever,”²⁶—when he writes this, he is suggesting that the present conjuncture is also characterized by the advent of a “false talk”

²⁴ Ibid.: 46.

²⁵ Michaels, *The Trouble with Diversity : How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality* 158.

²⁶ Ibid.

about difference in the face of real differences (e.g. what you believe or your class). Here is another example from Arif Dirlik: “There is to all appearances a racialization of political and cultural discourses over the past few decades.”²⁷ While “class more than ever cuts across and through racial divides,” “class had practically disappeared from analysis with the cultural and postcolonial turn.”²⁸

This “cultural turn” in our talk about social injustice, especially racism, is, as we have seen above, a well-recognized shift. It has meant a turn away from class analysis. Žizek, following from Wendy Brown, agrees:

it is *here*, in this silent suspension of class analysis, that we are dealing with an exemplary case of the mechanism of ideological *displacement*: when class antagonism is disavowed, when its key structuring role is suspended, ‘other markers of social difference may come to bear an inordinate weight; indeed they may bear the weight of the sufferings produced by capitalism in addition to that attributable to the explicitly politicized marking.’ In other words, this displacement accounts for the somewhat ‘excessive’ way the discourse of postmodern identity politics insists on the horrors of sexism, racism, and so on—this ‘excess’ comes from the fact that these other ‘-isms’ have to bear the surplus-investments from the class struggle whose extent is not acknowledged.²⁹

In Arif Dirlik’s account, the turn toward identity and away from class has resulted in the “fetishization of race (and ethnicity) by its proponents as well as its opponents.”³⁰ For Dirlik, one painful irony is that non-European societies “have asserted the validity of native cultures and epistemologies even as they partake in the deepening of the cultural practices of capitalist society in production and consumption alike. The combination underlies the reification of native cultures as emblems of identity, even as they lose the ground-level diversity of lived cultures.”³¹

²⁷ Dirlik, “Race Talk, Race, and Contemporary Racism,” 1364.

²⁸ Ibid.: 1376.

²⁹ Judith Butler, Ernesto Laclau and Slavoj Žizek, Contingency, Hegemony, Universality : Contemporary Dialogues on the Left (London: Verso, 2000) 97. Partially quoted from Wendy Brown, States of Injury : Power and Freedom in Late Modernity (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995).

³⁰ Dirlik, “Race Talk, Race, and Contemporary Racism,” 1365.

³¹ Ibid.: 1374.

One could argue that my above account reflects a particular ideological perspective. Many of the scholars I have cited... The extracts I have reproduced... It does reflect a particular ideological framework; and that is because this dissertation is concerned with fights on the Left. While this dissertation is largely about race and cinema of the past, it follows from four premises whose implications go beyond the sphere of artistic production. First, is the premise that in recognizing that today we inhabit a changed racial landscape, the question “What is racism?” is neither coy nor anachronistic, nor irrelevant. Second, that this changed landscape is part of a global phenomenon—not merely restricted to the United States. Third, that one feature of the contemporary landscape is that discourses around race have changed their function, though perhaps not their rhetoric (e.g. Benn Michaels on antiracism). Fourth, that “expert” analysis of social injustices has been racialized, that a class analysis has been displaced rather than complemented by other identity-oriented approaches to the social and political. We have been experiencing both an “ethnic turn” in left academic studies (see Dirlik, Benn Michaels, E. San Juan Jr.) and an “ethnic turn” in the actual affective attachments and identifications of regular people all around the world (e.g. “the ethnicization of the national”). For many in the mainstream, the “ethnic turn” is a natural corrective to the vulgar economism and ethnocentrism of materialist analysis and Communist Party influenced social movements. After all, as Arif Dirlik notes, the “natives” want ethnicity; they are reclaiming it everywhere. But that the academic left’s instincts have coincided with real changes in peoples’ hearts and minds the world over does not mean that the academic left has finally correctly reconstructed itself—left behind its tired vulgar economism, and its racist Eurocentrism reinforced by suspect communist and socialist parties and proto-parties. But, it could just mean that people are mistaken—that their hearts and minds are fallible, that things may look one way, but be another way. For some observers, it means that the left has thrown out the baby with the bathwater; it has quietly renounced, in the words of Žižek, “any real attempt to overcome the existing capital liberal regime.”³² For the authors that I have cited, there is nothing natural or inevitable about “the ethnic turn.”

The ethnic turn has not received much critical scrutiny from film scholars. It tends to be taken for granted as an advance in our thinking about society and a triumph in the fight against racism and

³² Butler, Laclau and Žižek, Contingency, Hegemony, Universality : Contemporary Dialogues on the Left 95.

Eurocentrism. The aim of my dissertation is to challenge this complacency by asking how ethnicity is constructed—by whom, to the exclusion of what, for what purpose, and why now. This is not a dissertation about the representation of race in mainstream cinema or racial stereotypes or whiteness. This dissertation is about race in explicitly political cinema made between 1960 and 2002 in the United States and Brazil. That the films I examine, whether historical films or not, are haunted by the past is an unavoidable expression of their political aspirations. Thus, in some sense, this is also a dissertation about the filmic representation of history. Finally, it is about how the encounter between Marxism and race has played out in the cinema, and how a Marxist analysis of racial oppression gave way to an identity-oriented, culturalist approach. In other words, this dissertation is an investigation of the “ethnic turn”—as it has been described above by Arif Dirlik, Slavoj Zizek, Wendy Brown, Walter Benn Michaels—in the sphere of cinema.

2. *Political Cinema*

But what is political cinema? That is, what does it mean to say that cinema is *political*? Does film have a medium-specific political potential? And if so, in what does that potential reside? One might reply to these questions flatfootedly: political cinema is one genre among many, concerned narratively with politics and politicians, either on the Right or on the Left of the political spectrum. But traditionally, scholars have taken a more sophisticated approach. A survey of the field yields three main alternatives.

Some scholars such as Comolli and Narboni have argued that while “*every film is political*, inasmuch as it is determined by the ideology which produces it (or within which it is produced, which stems from the same thing),”³³ the political film is a special category of film that stands in a critical relationship to the dominant ideology. Comolli and Narboni define this object—the political film—immanently, by examining its textual elements. So that the ideologically ‘good’/‘best’ filmic text or what I am understanding to be the political film is the film that attacks the prevailing capitalist ideology on two fronts, at the level of the signified and signifier, or roughly, at the level of content and form. This is a film that contests dominant ideology

³³ Jean-Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni, “Cinema/Ideology/Criticism,” *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, 5th Edition, eds. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) 754.

explicitly in its narrative and challenges the “traditional way of depicting reality” in its stylistic choices, in its means of representation.³⁴ On this view, the political character of a film is determined neither by a critical action performed on the text by experts nor by the action the text inspires (or not) in the world by ordinary viewers. So that we could be faced with a paradox: the most “politically radical” text could, in a certain historical moment, have negligible impact on its spectators and on the world.³⁵

The second approach to political cinema has addressed this scenario by refusing to treat political cinema as a bounded, semi-fixed entity, affirming instead the radical historicity of film texts. The politics of a cinematic text, the argument has gone, are not contained *within* the text which, on this view, is inherently unstable. Rather, politics are something to be determined in the context of film reception. In other words, films are political to the extent that they inspire political activities (or are *read* politically) on the part of actual audiences.³⁶

The third approach argues that political cinema is political when it employs alternative (i.e. not industrial) modes of filmic production, distribution, and exhibition. The idea is that the filmmaking process entails certain relations of production. On this view, a film may be considered political when it thwarts capitalist (that is, industrial) relations of production, which are characterized by a stark, hierarchical division of labor. Anything produced within such a division of labor, regardless of its form or content, can hardly be considered political.³⁷

It is worth observing first, that in these three predominant formulations of political cinema, political cinema reserves for itself a peculiar orientation toward changing the social world, the world outside of representation. Secondly, in all of these three approaches, political cinema is by definition partisan and anti-

³⁴ Ibid. 756.

³⁵ For other expressions of this view, see Mike Wayne, Political Film : The Dialectics of Third Cinema (London: Pluto, 2001); Tomás Gutierrez Alea, "The Viewer's Dialectic," New Latin American Cinema, Volume 1: Theory, Practices, and Transcontinental Articulations, ed. Michael Martin (Detroit: Wayne State, 1997); Paul Willeman, "The Third Cinema Question: Notes and Reflections," The New Latin American Cinema, Volume 1: Theory, Practices, and Transcontinental Articulations, ed. Michael Martin (Detroit: Wayne State, 1997).

³⁶ For this view, see Sylvia Harvey, May '68 and Film Culture (London: British Film Institute, 1980); Barbara Klinger and netLibrary Inc., "Melodrama and Meaning History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk," (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), vol.

³⁷ For this view, see Julianne Burton, "Film Artisans and Film Industries in Latin America, 1956-1980: Theoretical and Critical Implications of Variations in Modes of Filmic Production and Consumption," New Latin American Cinema, Volume One: Theory, Practices and Transcontinental Articulations, ed. Michael Martin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997); David E. James, Allegories of Cinema : American Film in the Sixties (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1989). Also, see the work of Michael Chanan.

capitalist (though perhaps not explicitly socialist). In the past, when we have talked about political cinema, we have not been talking about a politically neutral film practice; we have been talking about a cinematic practice defined by its opposition to the capitalist status quo. Political cinema—whether understood as a bounded entity or reading practice of historically situated audiences or forged within an artisanal mode of production—has historically articulated its project in relation to Marxism, the theoretical tradition responsible for the most systematic critique of capitalism ever produced.

Latin America is in many ways the natural place to begin a discussion of political cinema. It was there, in the 1960s, that some of the most significant debates about political cinema took place. At the very historical moment French film theorists were rethinking the cinema's relationship to politics in the wake of the events of May 1968, in Latin America, filmmakers and theorists were also trying to articulate for themselves a political role for the cinema. But the earliest Latin American manifestoes engaged in this endeavor rejected the European models, proposing an alternative tripartite taxonomy: First Cinema would refer to industrial cinema epitomized by Hollywood; Second Cinema to auteur cinema, including Italian Neo-realism and the French *nouvelle vague*;³⁸ and Third cinema, a filmmaking practice committed explicitly to social transformation. The term was first coined by the Argentine filmmakers-critics Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino in their essay, "Towards a Third Cinema: Notes and Experiences for the Development of a Cinema of Liberation in the Third World" (1969), following shortly on the heels of their canonical Third Cinema filmic text, *La hora de los hornos* (1968).³⁹ While French theorists were imagining Godard as the model figure of progressive cinema, the Third Cinema theorists excluded Godard from the Third Cinema pantheon (including him in Second Cinema group instead) on the grounds that "Godard stands out as the great

³⁸ It is worth noting that the formulation of second cinema has been especially unstable. In some accounts it is tied to art cinema and in others (like Teshome Gabriel's) it is tied to national cinema. This instability is perhaps one reason why Brazilian Cinema Novo has been lumped in with Second Cinema even though its most famous practitioner, Glauber Rocha, has been claimed for Third Cinema. See Teshome H. Gabriel, Third Cinema in the Third World : The Aesthetics of Liberation, Studies in Cinema ; No. 21 (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1982).

³⁹ See Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino, "Towards a Third Cinema: Notes and Experiences for the Development of a Cinema Liberation in the Third World," The New Latin American Cinema, Volume 1: Theory, Practices, and Transcontinental Articulations, ed. Michael Martin (Detroit: Wayne State, 1997). For an excellent historical treatment of the essay and a discussion of various decontextualized appropriations of it, see Jonathan Buchsbaum, "A Closer Look at *Third Cinema*," Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television 21.2 (2001). Especially helpful is Buchsbaum's discussion of the relationship between "militant cinema" and "Third Cinema."

destroyer of bourgeois cinema...He managed to make anti-bourgeois cinema but he could not make people's cinema."⁴⁰ Mike Wayne, in a recent treatment of Third Cinema, *The Political Film: The Dialectics of Third Cinema* (1999), considers Third Cinema to be "the most advanced and sophisticated body of political films which the medium has produced."⁴¹ Furthermore, and perhaps this is the largely unsaid truth of the Third Cinema debates, "it is a cinema defined by its socialist politics."⁴²

Since the 1980s, few works of Third Cinema have been produced and the scholarly literature on the subject has abated. When contemporary scholars do mention Third Cinema, it is typically in order to announce its death. In retrospective assessments of Third Cinema, Latin Americanist film scholars Ana Lopez and Zuzana Pick periodized political filmmaking in Latin America: Third Cinema would refer to an early phase in the evolution of the New Latin American Cinema (NLAC).⁴³ The NLAC according to Pick rearticulates the "confining rhetoric of the militant 1960s" (i.e. Third Cinema theory):⁴⁴

Mostly in the 1960s, films stressed class struggle as the only possible way out of social injustice. To restore the subject into history, filmmakers systematically addressed in their writings national identity through the pervading usage of an all-encompassing notion of national reality. Yet the films studied in this book...problematize the erasure of regional, social, racial, and sexual differences implied by the term national *reality* and privilege subjective and collective identities as embattled sites of representation and discourse.⁴⁵

Third Cinema is cast as both nationalist (with its "all encompassing notion of national reality") and class-oriented, while the post-1960's NLAC Pick elaborates in her book is refreshingly continental. According to Pick, the unfinished ideological project of the NLAC is the construction of a pan-Latin American continental cinema that will be the product of the resolution of a Latin American identity conundrum. That resolution begins, in Roberto Parada's words, at "that moment in our history when we acquire the notion of our worth

⁴⁰ Alea, "The Viewer's Dialectic," 114.

⁴¹ Wayne, *Political Film: The Dialectics of Third Cinema* 1.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ See Ana López, "An 'Other' History: The New Latin American Cinema," *New Latin American Cinema, Volume 1: Theory, Practices, and Transcontinental Articulations*, ed. Michael Martin (Detroit: Wayne State, 1997); Zuzana M. Pick, *The New Latin American Cinema: A Continental Project*, Texas Film Studies Series, 1st ed. (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1993).

⁴⁴ Pick, *The New Latin American Cinema: A Continental Project* 194.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

and in which we decide to follow our ambitions. When we decide not to be imitators and followers, we begin to see the world in relation to who we are, in relation to the Americas, as Latin Americans.”⁴⁶ For Pick, the identity predicament—“who we are...as Latin Americans”—does not require the articulation of a rigid or “authentic” cultural identity in opposition to an “original” Western cultural identity. The condition is one of *mestizaje definitivo*, of eternal hybridity, of “not being and being someone else” (a formulation taken from Paulo Emilio Salles Gomez).⁴⁷ This formulation has the virtue of “reassert[ing] the yet untold and multiple narratives of cultural identity and national realities, it is the principle upon which Latin Americans have challenged fixed notions and imagined new utopias.”⁴⁸ In place of the exclusionary nationalism of the Third Cinema manifestoes, Pick puts the celebration of cultural pluralism at the center of the political project of the NLAC, which she implicitly understands to be one of identity-formation; and that is not the same as a cinema of social transformation.

The turn to identity in assessments of the transformation of Third Cinema as well as theory have been echoed by other film scholars as well. In Robert Stam’s treatment of the inevitable demise of Third Cinema, he finds that it was a movement unable to keep up with the “growing sophistication of the debate around Eurocentrism, Afrocentrism, multiculturalism.”⁴⁹ Moreover, in the most recent volume on Third Cinema, *Rethinking Third Cinema*, Guneratne, the editor of the anthology, complains of the lacunae of Third Cinema—“[its] emphasis on class struggle to the near-exclusion of other, ‘secondary’ forms of oppression.”⁵⁰ His idea of “rethinking” turns out to be a virtual explosion of the designation “Third Cinema”: a Marxist-oriented political cinema practice gives way to the massive terrain of national cinema practice from the so-called Third World with a vaguely critical character, and a definite multiculturalist political bent. Little remains to distinguish “Third Cinema” from “Third World Cinema.” And that is perhaps the point.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Quoted in *Ibid.* 197.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Robert Stam, “Eurocentrism, Afrocentrism, Polycentrism: Theories of Third Cinema,” *Otherness and the Media: The Ethnography of the Imagined and Imaged*, eds. Hamid Naficy and Teshome H. Gabriel (Switzerland: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1993) 234.

⁵⁰ I take this “secondary” to mean racial and ethnic forms. Anthony R. Guneratne and Wimal Dissanayake, *Rethinking Third Cinema* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2003) 17.

⁵¹ In *Film Theory: An Introduction*, Robert Stam cites Guneratne: “From Anthony Guneratne’s proposal for a book entitled ‘Rethinking Third World Cinema’ (given me by the author).” Presumably Guneratne decided against that title, in effect further obscuring the

The trouble with “the ethnic turn” in the narratives of film scholars writing on Third Cinema is not so much that it inaccurately describes what is/has been occurring (a move toward multiculturalism), but rather that it treats this development approvingly and naturally, as if the turn to identity in supposedly political cinema requires little examination. But in my view, the rise of racial and cultural identity in the films and discourses around the New Latin American Cinema requires careful examination as does the changing notions of what constitutes political intervention in the terrain of cinema. How *did* the early Third Cinema treat race and ethnicity? Does the “near-exclusion” Guneratne refers to accurately describe the case? How may we map the new ways in which race and ethnicity are being deployed in more recent, nominally political cinema? How is the multiculturalist project being taken up? By whom? Toward what end? These are the questions I will address in my dissertation.

3. Brazil and the United States

Both Brazil and the United States have inherited a comparable history of African slavery, indigenous genocide, and formidable European immigration. But while Brazilian race relations have been largely shaped by the prevailing nationalist ideology of racial democracy, an ideology that has emphasized the ambiguities of racial classification and the high degree of mixture, race relations in the United States have been characterized by racial polarization, racial classification based on the rule of hypo-descent, and the absence of a comparable national myth of racial harmony. Recently, scholars have begun to notice greater racial polarization in Brazil as well, at least at the level of discourse and among black activists.⁵² Some explain this shift by arguing that asymmetrical globalization (i.e. Americanization) has meant that even United States academic paradigms—including frameworks for understanding race—are becoming hegemonic, globally.⁵³ More evidence that the “ethnic turn” is a global phenomenon.

distinctions between the terms and recuperating the ethnic/cultural at the expense of the political. This citation was brought to my attention by Jonathan Buchsbaum in a presentation at the 2007 ACLA annual conference in Puebla. See Robert Stam, Film Theory : An Introduction (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 2000) 338.

⁵² See Edward Eric Telles, Race in Another America: The Significance of Skin Color in Brazil (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004).

⁵³ For example, Pierre Bourdieu and Löic Wacquant write: "If the USA is truly exceptional,...it is above all for the *rigid dualism* of its racial division. Even more so, it is for its capacity to impose as universal that which is most particular to itself while passing off as

Still, in the sphere of media, one is struck by the sharp differences between “antiracist” media representation and academic media discourse in contemporary Brazil and the United States. First, Brazil has few people writing about racial representation in film and television. The only two recent book-length studies that have been produced subscribe to a positive/negative images approach to representation, in the style of Donald Bogle’s *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies & Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films* (1973). João Carlos Rodrigues’s *O Negro Brasileiro e o cinema* (2001) and Joel Zito Araújo’s *A Negação do Brasil: O negro na telenovela Brasileira* (*The Denial of Brazil*, 2000) carefully detail the demeaning stereotypes of Afro-Brazilians that dominate Brazilian cinema and television soap operas,⁵⁴ respectively, and call for more positive and proportional representation (one that reflects the fact that more than half of Brazil population is of color) both in front of and behind the camera.⁵⁵ While I am not trying to suggest that the Brazilian academic establishment is “behind the times,” I do think that the prevailing approach taken to the topic is symptomatic of a different terrain, whose topography will be revealed in the course of my study.

The second striking difference is that in Brazil, well-intentioned cinematic representations of racial oppression tend to focus on the period of slavery. In the United States, by contrast, political representations of racism have privileged the era of state-sanctioned discrimination and the Civil Rights Movement. These differences suggest two fundamentally distinct ways of understanding what constitutes a racist society, or so I

exceptional that which makes it most common” (51). Furthermore, the USA accomplishes “this symbolic dominion and influence...over every kind of scholarly and, especially, semi-scholarly production” through the “material and symbolic profits that researchers in the dominated countries reap from a more or less assumed or ashamed adherence to the model derived from the USA” (46). The materials profits of course come from “major American philanthropic and research foundations,” including the Rockefeller Foundation, and from academic publishing opportunities. Bourdieu and Wacquant target the Brazilianist political scientist Michael Hanchard for his suggestion that the Brazilian black movement begin to model itself after the U.S. civil rights movement. Hanchard becomes, for the authors, an unfortunate pawn of cultural imperialism: “Indeed, cultural imperialism (American or otherwise) never imposes itself better than when it is served by progressive intellectuals (or by ‘intellectuals of colour’ in the case of racial inequality) who would appear to be above suspicion of promoting the hegemonic interests of a country against which they wield the weapons of social criticism” (51). The 1999 publication of Bourdieu and Wacquant’s essay created quite a controversy as it pitted the “real” leftists against, among other obvious opponents, black movement activists. In addition, the essay seemed to many to defend racial democracy, not an entirely inaccurate assessment. Still, the well regarded Brazil-based anthropologist and scholar of race, Peter Fry, would ultimately sympathize with Bourdieu and Wacquant while acknowledging that the hegemony of US frameworks for understanding race in Brazil are beginning to have real effects on Brazilian reality. See Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, “The Cunning of Imperialist Reason,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 16.1 (1999); Peter Fry, *A Persistência Da Raça : Ensaio Antropológico Sobre O Brasil E a África Austral* (Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 2005). For critiques of Bourdieu and Wacquant, see John D. French, “The Missteps of Anti-Imperialist Reason: Bourdieu, Wacquant and Hanchard’s *Orpheus and Power*,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 17.1 (2000); Edward Eric Telles, “Us Foundations and Racial Reasoning in Brazil,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 20.4 (2003); Michael George Hanchard, “Acts of Misrecognition: Transnational Black Politics, Anti-Imperialism and the Ethnocentrism of Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant,” *Theory, Culture & Society* 20.4 (2003).

⁵⁴ See Joel Zito Araújo, *A Negação Do Brasil : O Negro Na Telenovela Brasileira* (São Paulo, SP: Editora SENAC São Paulo, 2000); João Carlos Rodrigues, *O Negro Brasileiro E O Cinema*, [3. ed. (Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Pallas, 2001).

⁵⁵ *O Negro Brasileira e o Cinema* was originally published in 1988. The 2001 version is the third edition.

believe. In the United States, the act of discrimination, with its individual agent and victim, is the paradigmatic form of racism. This makes it difficult to represent contemporary forms of racial injustice, which do not conform to the paradigm, and which constitute, in the words of Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, a “racism without racists.” In Brazil, the focus on the period of slavery arguably has its own ideological function: to lend support to the pervasive ideology of racial democracy by suggesting that Brazil’s stark racial inequality is merely a remnant of the pre-Abolition past.

So far, there has been little comparative work examining the ways in which explicitly political films in these countries have tried to make sense of racial oppression, how these representations have changed over time, and what those changes indicate about the shifting terms of both national and global debates over increasing social inequality. My dissertation addresses this lacuna.

4. *Chronotopes*

My studies in the ethnic turn are focused around three chronotopes: the maroon settlement, the ghetto, and the suburb. The notion of the chronotope (originally from physics) was first applied to artistic production—and specifically to the novel—by Mikhail Bakhtin. Literally meaning “time-space,” the chronotopic refers to a “concrete whole” in which “spatial and temporal indicators are fused.”⁵⁶ For example, “the castle” in eighteenth-century Gothic fiction is chronotopic in that it evokes simultaneously a spatialized image as well as a temporal marker, medieval times. “Time becomes palpable and visible” in the figure of the castle,⁵⁷ and “space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, history.”⁵⁸ While “any and every literary image is chronotopic” in the sense that any and every literary image evokes a historical world (outside representation) with definite temporal markers,⁵⁹ the *chronotope* refers to chronotopic images that have a special link to particular genres.⁶⁰ The castle in Gothic fiction is not chronotopic, but a chronotope because besides indicating a temporal dimension, the castle also helps designate the genre. Other examples of

⁵⁶ M. M. Bakhtin and Michael Holquist, *The Dialogic Imagination : Four Essays*, University of Texas Press Slavic Series ; No. 1 (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981) 84.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 250.

⁵⁸ Ibid. 84.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 251.

⁶⁰ Ibid. 85.

chronotopes are “the salon” in the nineteenth-century French novel; “the inn” in the picaresque novel; “the ship” in the works of Conrad and Melville; “the road” in different ways in different genres.⁶¹ The chronotope, according to Bakhtin, is “the primary means for materializing time in space.”⁶²

Scholars like Robert Stam, Vivian Sobchack, Michael Montgomery, and more recently, Paula Massood have extended the concept of the chronotope to film. Stam observes that “whereas literature plays itself out within a virtual, lexical space, the cinematic chronotope is quite literal, splayed out concretely across a screen.”⁶³ Sobchack has discussed the lounge time chronotope of *Film Noir*—which includes the nightclubs, cocktail lounges, bars, anonymous hotel rooms, boardinghouses, diners—that replace the safety and nurturance of the idyllic chronotope: the home.⁶⁴ For Sobchack, the lounge time chronotope “emerges out of actually lived cultural spaces” and indexes a response to a post-war sense of disorientation and transition.⁶⁵ Paula Massood has adapted Bakhtin’s analysis to the chronotope of “the hood” in contemporary hood films like *Boyz n the Hood* (1991) and *Straight Out of Brooklyn* (1991).⁶⁶ In both of these examples, the chronotope offers a link between the world of cinematic representation and the historical world, between text and context. While texts are always mediated—never mere reflections of the world outside representation—in the chronotope the image of “materialized time” reaches out toward the real world, resonating with audiences’ shared spatio-temporal reference points.⁶⁷ This sort of link is especially interesting for the political analysis of cinema.

The four body chapters of my dissertation are organized around three chronotopic spaces. These spatiotemporal structures—the maroon settlement, the “Watts ghetto,” the Eisenhower suburbs—link an examination of race to three distinct historical time periods: slavery in colonial Brazil, post-civil rights urban uprisings, and the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement. These are three mythic periods in their respective

⁶¹ Robert Stam, *Subversive Pleasures : Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism, and Film* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989) 11.

⁶² Bakhtin and Holquist, *The Dialogic Imagination : Four Essays* 250.

⁶³ Stam, *Subversive Pleasures : Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism, and Film* 11.

⁶⁴ Vivian Sobchack, “Lounge Time: Postwar Crises and the Chronotope of *Film Noir*,” *Refiguring American Film Genres: Theory and History*, ed. Nick Browne (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* 166.

⁶⁶ Paula J. Massood, “City Spaces and City Times: Bakhtin’s Chronotope and Recent African-American Film,” *Screening the City*, eds. Mark Shiel and Tony Fitzmaurice (London: Verso, 2003).

⁶⁷ Sobchack, “Lounge Time: Postwar Crises and the Chronotope of *Film Noir*,” 150. Also see, Michael V. Montgomery, *Carnivals and Commonplaces : Bakhtin’s Chronotope, Cultural Studies, and Film*, American University Studies. Series Iv, English Language and Literature, Vol. 173 (New York: P. Lang, 1993); Bakhtin and Holquist, *The Dialogic Imagination : Four Essays*.

national contexts. And so, in some sense, the films that I will examine in this dissertation are all historical, even though some are set in a time period that is roughly contemporary with their filming.

The Quilombo

It is often said that Cinema Novo was a particular variety of political cinema: it was a utopian cinema.⁶⁸ This can certainly not be said of its Cuban counterpart, for example. The cinema of *Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematograficos* (ICAIC) was certainly a political cinema but not a utopian one. How could it be? The revolution had been won. Cinema's contribution would be to exorcize bourgeois ideology, to construct a new socialist man better suited to the revolutionary process being implemented from above. The best Cuban films of the decades following the revolution—*Lucía* (1968), *Memorias del subdesarrollo* (1968), *El otro Francisco* (1975)—taught important lessons: that the political struggles of the past had been dogged by patriarchal gender roles; that underdevelopment is not merely an economic condition but also a psychic condition like the one analyzed by Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks*; that the abolition of slavery is not to be explained as the moral triumph of altruists but rather as the victory of British sugar interests in the transition from mercantilism to monopoly capitalism. These Cuban films were ultimately films about the practical problems of building socialism, and particularly the problems of constructing a popular socialist consciousness.

The early Cinema Novo films were in some sense also about consciousness, but the consciousness-raising being done was consciousness of the *need* for a radical transformation of the society. The paradigmatic instance of this orientation is the ending of *Deus e o Diabo na terra de sol* (1964), in which the peasant Manuel and his wife, having given up their lives of exploitation working for a big rancher, refused the consolation of syncretic Afro-Brazilian religious salvation, and recoiled from the violence of voluntaristic banditry, run through *sertão* (arid desert region of northeastern Brazil) toward the sea. A chorus of voices (the people) repeats the refrain, "The *sertão* will become the sea and the sea will become the *sertão*... A world badly divided

⁶⁸ See Lúcia Nagib, *Brazil on Screen : Cinema Novo, New Cinema, Utopia*, Tauris World Cinema Series (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007); Silvia Oroz, "Nacionalismo Y Utopia: Dos Paradigmas Del Cine Latino Americano," (unpublished paper, 2005), vol.

cannot produce good because the earth belongs to man not to god or the devil,” as the image of a desiccated *sertão* dissolves literally into the sea, suggesting both the actual migration of rural peasants to the urban population centers of the coast and the transformed landscape of Manuel’s imagination. This final sequence perfectly encapsulates the utopian impulse of the Cinema Novo movement as it lurched toward a happy, future, non-place alternative.

The *sertão* and the *favela* (the urban slum) were privileged spaces of the Cinema Novo filmscape, themselves chronotopes.⁶⁹ Brazilian film scholar Ivana Bentes has argued that these spaces have long represented the other side of Brazilian modernity; they are “places of misery, mysticism and the disinherited, non-places and paradoxically places of picture postcard beauty, with their storehouses of ‘typicality’, where tradition and invention are extracted from adversity.”⁷⁰ While they are not exactly utopian spaces—they are miserable and disinherited—their intimate relationship to utopia is somehow undeniable. It was from the heart of these “non-places” that the Cinema Novo posited the radical possibilities of social transformation. But there was another iconic space of the movement that—though memorialized in Glauber Rocha’s 1965 seminal manifesto, “The Esthetic of Hunger,” and in a short documentary that is commonly thought to have launched the movement—has been neglected by film scholars. It is the space of the *quilombo*, which is a settlement of escaped slaves—what in English is called a maroon society.⁷¹ Though it is little discussed, the *quilombo* has imposed itself thematically on politically-minded filmmakers attempting to address the peculiarities of Brazilian racial oppression.⁷²

The *quilombo* is symbolically complex, referring at once to settlements of escaped slaves that existed during the colonial period and on the other hand to contemporary rural black communities populated by the

⁶⁹ For several treatments of these spaces, see Lúcia Nagib, *The New Brazilian Cinema* (London I.B. Tauris in Association with the Centre for Brazilian Studies, 2003). I have not read an analysis of these iconic spaces that makes use of a Bakhtinian framework. Still, the *sertão* and the *favela* seem good examples of chronotopes.

⁷⁰ Ivana Bentes, “The Sertão and the Favela in Contemporary Brazilian Film,” *The New Brazilian Cinema*, ed. Lucia Nagib (London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 2003) 121.

⁷¹ Although *quilombo* is a foreign word, I will not generally italicize it.

⁷² One interesting side note is that the *favela* is these days compared to a quilombo. Ivana Bentes fits this suggestive reference into her essay on the *sertão* and the *favela*: “The culture of samba in the *favelas* is seen, over and over, as a niche, a kind of urban *quilombo*, at once integrated with and isolated from the city” (131). See Bentes, “The Sertão and the Favela in Contemporary Brazilian Film.” For other suggestive treatments of the quilombo-favela convergence, see Lourdes Carril, *Quilombo, Favela E Periferia : A Longa Busca Da Cidadania*, Geografias E Adjacências, 1a ed. (São Paulo: ANNABLUME : FAPESP, 2006); Andreilino Campos, *Do Quilombo Àa Favela : A Produção Do "Espaço Criminalizado" No Rio De Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Bertrand Brasil, 2005).

descendents of maroons. The “quilombo” is a symbolic crossroads where a utopian strain of political thinking converges with a central preoccupation of Brazilian national identity—the question of Brazil’s racial character. The quilombo has been adopted by the black movement as a powerful symbol of resistance to slavery and, later, to the ideology of racial democracy, and it has come to be embraced by the democratic Brazilian state that, in the constitution of 1988, granted land rights to “remanescentes [remnants] de quilombos.” There is, perhaps, no more potent symbol of resistance in the Brazilian imaginary. But the ascendance of the quilombo in Brazilian life and representation was neither natural nor inevitable. Invented traditions and the histories from which they draw inspiration, as Hobsbawm has argued, tend to respond to the needs of the context in which they are invented and to serve the requirements of the particular constituencies that mobilize them.⁷³ The quilombo is no exception. It is a contested site, which has been deployed by different constituencies for different ideological ends at different historical moments—by Marxist historiographers in the 50s, by the black movement in the 70s, by liberal filmmakers in the 80s, and by the Brazilian state in the 1990s. The first two chapters of my dissertation investigate the Brazilian cinematic tradition of representing the quilombo. This, however, is not undertaken for its own sake, but for the sake of illuminating the peculiar character of Brazilian racial politics. The representation of the quilombo is not just one idiosyncratic topic among others; it is not just another variation of the tired but logically inexhaustible formula: “representations of X.” On the contrary, the quilombo is *the* place to begin an investigation of race in the Brazilian imaginary. It is the place where the long-standing utopian tradition in Brazil letters converges with leftist activism and the fraught controversies surrounding Brazilian national identity. The quilombo’s prominence in Brazilian cinema and politics is unique: it has no parallel in other Latin American polities with comparable histories of enslavement and marronage. This phenomenon cries out for an explanation.⁷⁴

⁷³ E. J. and Ranger Hobsbawm, T. O., The Invention of Tradition (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

⁷⁴ See Rodrigues, O Negro Brasileiro E O Cinema 12; Peter Fry, "Politics, Nationality, and the Meanings Of "Race" In Brazil," Daedalus 129.2 (2000): 12.

Chapter Two examines the circulation of representations of the most famous *quilombo* of Brazilian history, the seventeenth-century maroon republic of Palmares, and its leader, Zumbi. I follow the story of Palmares from its appearance in leftist history through its presence in political theatre and cinema, including in two feature films by the Cinema Novo giant Carlos Diegues, *Ganga Zumba* (1963) and *Quilombo* (1984). I argue that following the release of *Ganga Zumba*, the representations of Palmares and Zumbi became increasingly spatialized, and eventually, nationalized—thus transforming their political function. I show that this transformation was evident in Diegues’ second Palmares film, *Quilombo*, and that it owes much to the encounter between Palmares historiography, Brazilian *modernismo*, and the black movement.

Chapter Three examines two short documentary films—*Aruanda* (1960), a classic Cinema Novo antecedent, and *Quilombo* (1975)—about contemporary *quilombos*. Both of these films belong to the oeuvre of one of Brazil’s most important documentary filmmakers, Vladimir Carvalho. Unlike many films (including Diegues’ *Quilombo*) and unlike the black movement ideology of “quilombismo,” which locate the utopian element of the *quilombo* in a distinctly African or Afro-Brazilian culture, *Aruanda* and Carvalho’s *Quilombo* trace the utopian aspiration of the *quilombo* to the non-alienated human life-activity of its members. Carvalho’s preoccupation with pre-capitalistic forms of artisanal labor situates these documentaries (and most of his oeuvre) squarely within the category of ethnographic film, and in particular within the tradition of Robert Flaherty, whom Carvalho has explicitly embraced as a model. The second part of the chapter investigates how Carvalho’s *quilombo* documentaries negotiate the contested terrain of ethnographic film. I consider the extent to which Carvalho is able to recuperate the much-criticized romantic strain in Flaherty’s work and harness it for a left politics.

The Ghetto

Paula Massood has discussed the function of the “the hood” as chronotope in recent African American cinema. In these films, “the hood” indexes the State’s abandonment of the inner city as a result of government-shrinking, neoliberal policies introduced by the Reagan administration in the 1980s, and pursued into the 90s by Bush and Clinton. In this recent production, “the hood” is both the space-time of the failed promise of Civil Rights and of a cultural renaissance in African American expressive culture. But Massood suggests that “the hood” had emerged first as a chronotope in the 1960s in Blaxploitation films and in the films of the Los Angeles School of Black Filmmakers including *Sweet Sweetback’s Baadasssss Song* (Van Peebles, 1971), *The Spook Who Sat By the Door* (Ivan Dixon, 1973), *Bush Mama* (Haile Gerima, 1976), *Killer of Sheep* (Charles Burnett, 1977), *Bless Their Little Hearts* (Billy Woodberry, 1984).⁷⁵ While in the earlier films, “the hood” was a similarly enclosed, policed space, it had yet to be wholly abandoned to deindustrialization (as it was in the later films) by the U.S. state and city institutions responsible for administering it. If state institutions were still visible in the earlier films, they were largely missing (except the police) in the later films. Similarly, if the 1960s urban uprisings (i.e. Watts, Chicago, D.C.) haunted the time-space of “the hood” in earlier films, they were a distant memory in the later films. Finally if “the hood” of the earlier films carried the faint whiff of the great migration of African Americans north—from rural landscapes to urban centers—as did the Brazilian *favela* films of the late 1950s and 60s, the later films turn the city into the center, the source, the birthplace of African American culture. Both the earlier hood films and the later ones, though, share the temporal reference to a post-civil rights moment—a time after the defeat of *de jure* discrimination and a space defined by the very segregation the Civil Rights Movement was meant to end. In this single image—the hood, the ghetto—the whole problematic of racism in a liberal, capitalist polity is materialized.

Chapter Four of my dissertation will examine *Bush Mama* (Haile Gerima, 1976), a seminal film of the Los Angeles School of Black Filmmakers. Set in Watts after the 1965 uprising, *Bush Mama* centers around the coming-to-consciousness of Dorothy, a single mother on welfare. Profoundly influenced by Latin American

⁷⁵ Massood, “City Spaces and City Times: Bakhtin’s Chronotope and Recent African-American Film.” I refer to “the ghetto” rather than “the hood” in order to suggest that the films I will be talking about are not the contemporary ones that Massood calls “hood films.”

Third Cinema—Cuban cinema and Cinema Novo, in particular—*Bush Mama* is a perfect case for thinking through the links between Latin American political cinema and U.S. political cinema. Gerima tries to combine the insights of Latin American Third Cinema with autochthonous political commitments in what is perhaps one of the most suggestive filmic encounters between race and Marxism. Dorothy’s seeming turn toward revolutionary violence would suggest the film’s grounding in Third Worldism, bringing it even closer to Third Cinema. Indeed, this is the most common reading of this film. My analysis will problematize facile readings of *Bush Mama*’s political commitments. I will highlight the contradictory politics of the film—in particular, the subtle ways it pursues a politics of the black image.

The Suburb

The chronotope of “the suburb” is the anti-inner city: middle-class, homogenously white, exclusive. It offered a solution to population density, concrete, public transportation, racial integration. The space-time of “the suburb” is 50s America, before the shake-up of the Civil Rights Movement and Black Power. If *Film Noir* is uses the chronotope of “lounge time” to signal the loss of home, the 1950s domestic melodrama turns to the image of the suburban harmony of Eisenhower’s America to recapture the plenitude of home. Just as the cocktail lounge and the boardinghouse belong to *Film Noir*, so too does “the suburb” belong to 50s melodrama.

Chapter Five investigates identity politics in Todd Haynes’s 2002 film, *Far from Heaven*, and in two of its precursors, Douglas Sirk’s 50s melodrama, *All that Heaven Allows* (1955), and Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (1974). It takes as its starting point two puzzling features of Haynes’s film that owe to its dialogue with 50s domestic melodrama: (a) the oddity of setting a remake in the same time and place as its original (1955) and (b) the film’s banal representation of racism and homophobia. In the first part of this chapter, I argue, negatively, that *Far from Heaven* eludes many of the categories (*à la* remake, nostalgia film) that would allow us to make sense of its relation to Sirk and Fassbinder, and its relation to the contemporary moment. In the second part of the chapter, I argue, positively, for a reading of all three films that will ultimately cast *Far from Heaven* as a film responding to the problematic of coalition politics set up in *Ali: Fear*

Eats the Soul, which in turn recasts *All that Heaven Allows* as a film about identity and class politics. In doing so, I propose an alternative way of reading *Far from Heaven*'s seemingly straightforward (and ultimately banal) critique of the racism and homophobia of 50s society. I argue that Haynes's film disavows identity politics at the level of the narrative, and not coincidentally, it distances itself from the melodramatic mode at a formal level. It ultimately raises questions about the ability of the moralizing mode of melodrama to plausibly address contemporary forms of social injustice. *Far from Heaven* is in many ways about the "the ethnic turn," and thus underlines the historically unique challenges of representing racism today. This is one of few recent films that raises the question, what would it look like to come face to face with the racist present?

2.0 QUILOMBO AND UTOPIA, PART ONE: FROM MARXIST HISTORIOGRAPHY TO BRAZILIAN NATIONAL HOLIDAY

I

Between 1605 and 1695, a black maroon state—or *quilombo* in Portuguese¹—nestled in the hills of the *serra barriga* (which straddles the Brazilian states of Alagoas and Pernambuco) grew, evolved, fought, and eventually succumbed to the twenty-somethingieth expedition of yet another regional governor grown impatient with the state and its intransigent leader, Zumbi. This state was called Palmares, named for the palm trees that dominated its landscape. At its height it was said to number 20,000 people, most of whom were escaped slaves who had fled from the miserable conditions that prevailed in the surrounding sugar plantations.² It was the largest maroon state in all of Latin American history. Its inhabitants lived by a combination of subsistence agriculture, trade with cooperative, neighborly farmers, and raids on nearby plantations. Palmerinos were governed by kings, in what scholars have considered an African, likely Angolan, expression of that institution.³ And for almost a century this confederation of quilombos repelled the incursions of Portuguese, then Dutch (during the Dutch occupation of Pernambuco from 1630-1654), then Portuguese invaders instructed by the governor to stamp out this immediate threat to the colonial slave regime. After a failed peace agreement between the governor of Pernambuco and Ganga Zumba, a revered

¹ Although *quilombo* and *quilombolas* (maroons) are foreign words, in the remainder of this chapter I will not italicize either.

² Robert Nelson Anderson, "The Quilombo of Palmares: A New Overview of a Maroon State in Seventeenth-Century Brazil," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 28 (1996).

³ Stuart Schwartz, *Slaves, Peasants, and Rebels: Reconsidering Brazilian Slavery*. Urbana: University of Illinois press, 1992.

Palmarino leader, the Paulista *bandeirante* Domingos Jorge Velho and his army of landless peasants were recruited to put an end to the black state in the heart of the sugar colony. Jorge Velho and his men eventually succeeded, overtaking Macaco, the Palmares capital in 1694 and killing the notorious Zumbi on November 20, 1695.⁴ The destruction of Palmares was commemorated in Recife by six days of celebrations.⁵

II

Since 1995, the 300th anniversary of Zumbi's death, conferences, workshops, special publications, even a DVD by Gilberto Gil in 2002 have been convened, published, released under the title "300 years of Zumbi." Three hundred years *of* Zumbi—as if Zumbi has been with us, in spirit at least, continuously since his death in 1695. In reality, Zumbi—the symbol, the myth, the muse—has not been with us, *really with us*, for nearly so long. How long he has been with us, as a popular historical figure, is a difficult question. But the most liberal estimate could hardly stretch it for more than a century.

Although Zumbi and Palmares had been sporadically remembered by Brazilian historiography since the seventeenth century,⁶ it was not until the late 1970s that Zumbi remembrance reached a new pitch. In 1978, the black movement had officially adopted Zumbi as a black hero, declaring November 20th, the date of Zumbi's murder, the day of Black consciousness. In 1986, the vice-governor of Rio de Janeiro, anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro, succeeded in constructing a monument to Zumbi on Avenida Getúlio Vargas in Rio de Janeiro, right along the carnival procession route.⁷ Following the controversy around the centennial

⁴ For recent histories of Palmares, see Robert Nelson Anderson, "The *Quilombo* of Palmares: A New Overview of a Maroon State in Seventeenth-Century Brazil," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 28 (1996): 545-566; Gomes, Flávio. *Palmares: escravidão e liberdade no Atlântico Sul*. São Paulo: Contexto, 2005; João José Reis and Flávio dos Santos Gomes, *Liberdade por um fio: história dos quilombos no Brasil*. São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 1996. Pedro Paulo A. Funari and Aline Vieira de Carvalho, *Palmares, Ontem E Hoje* (Rio de Janeiro: Jorge Zahar Editor, 2005). Stuart B. Schwartz, *Slaves, Peasants, and Rebels : Reconsidering Brazilian Slavery*, Blacks in the New World (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992); Richard Price, "Refiguring Palmares," *Tipiti* 1.2 (2003); Ivan Alves Filho, *Memorial Dos Palmares*, Coleção Memória Viva (Rio de Janeiro, RJ: Xenon, 1988); Décio Freitas, *Palmares, a Guerra Dos Escravos*, Série Novas Perspectivas ; 12, 5a. ed. (Porto Alegre, RS: Mercado Aberto, 1984); Clóvis Moura, *Rebeliões Da Senzala : Quilombos, Insurreições, Guerrilhas* (São Paulo: Edições Zumbi, 1959); R.K. Kent, "Palmares: An African State in Brazil," *The Journal of African History* 6.2 (1965).

⁵ Mário Maestri, "Benjamin Péret: Un Olhar Heterodoxo Sobre Palmares," *O Quilombo Dos Palmares*, eds. Robert Ponge and Mário Maestri (Porto Alegre: Editora da UFRGS, 2002) 47.

⁶ For more on Zumbi/Palmares remembrance, see George Reid Andrews, *Blacks & Whites in São Paulo, Brazil, 1888-1988* (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991) 216-18.

⁷ For more on the history of the Zumbi monument, see Paulo Knauss de Mendonça and Ana Maria Mauad, *Cidade Vaidosa : Imagens Urbanas Do Rio De Janeiro* ([Rio de Janeiro, Brazil]: Sette Letras, 1999).

celebrations of Princess Isabel's signing of emancipation legislation, *Lei Áurea*, in 1888, the Brazilian government created the Palmares Cultural Foundation dedicated to creating and implementing "public policies that may create the possibilities for participation by the black population in development, arising from its history and culture."⁸ But 1995 was Zumbi's year. It was that year that the Movimento Negro Unificado (United Black Movement) marched on Brasília in Zumbi's name demanding recognition of racial discrimination in Brazil. It was the year of the first meeting of the Continental Congress of Black People's of the Americas. In 1995, the then president of Brazil, Fernando Henrique Cardoso made a very public journey to the site of the seventeenth century maroon state.⁹ Zumbi was the theme of that year's carnival in Salvador, the capital of Afro Brazil; and production had already begun on a miniseries for state educational television called "Zumbi, o rei dos Palmares," that aired in 1996. By 1995, Palmares and Zumbi, like *samba*, *candomblé*, and *feijoada*, had been effectively nationalized. And soon after forgotten.

This chapter is about how our relationship with Zumbi and the quilombo of Palmares came to be projected back in time 300 years. It is about the process of mythification, canonization, and nationalization that Palmares and Zumbi have undergone and about the reciprocal role that film and the arts have played in that metamorphosis.¹⁰ It is about Zumbi-mania and all it can tell us about contemporary racial politics in Brazil.

III

Joao Carlos Rodrigues, author of "the sole booklength study devoted to blacks in Brazilian Cinema,"¹¹ *O Negro Brasileiro e o Cinema*, and the most prominent writer on Afro-Brazilian representation in Brazilian media

⁸ Telles, *Race in Another America : The Significance of Skin Color in Brazil* 49.

⁹ Anderson, "The Quilombo of Palmares: A New Overview of a Maroon State in Seventeenth-Century Brazil."

¹⁰ Robert Nelson Anderson has written three articles on Palmares and Zumbi, all three exploring the "mythification of Zumbi" and "its representation in artistic production" (545). I consider this to be basically my own project, but one that I am undertaking only because I do not think that Anderson's approach was successful or nearly critical enough. He took for granted what needed to be explained—namely, why Palmares/Zumbi now? How Palmares/Zumbi? How Palmares/Zumbi representation has changed over time and why? See Ibid; Robert Nelson Anderson, "O Mito De Zumbi: Implicações Culturais Para O Brasil E Para a Diáspora Africana," *Afro-Ásia* 17 (1996); Robert Anderson, "The Muses of Chaos and Destruction of *Arena Conta Zumbi*," *Latin American Theatre Review* 29.2 (1996).

¹¹ Robert Stam, *Tropical Multiculturalism : A Comparative History of Race in Brazilian Cinema and Culture*, Latin America Otherwise (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997) 333.

has noted a paradoxical feature of Brazilian cinema's filmic treatments of Afro-Brazilians in the colonial period: while these films depict both slaves and maroons, they virtually exclude freed blacks.¹² This fact is the core of his polemical 1997 stocktaking essay, *Novas visões do negro Brasileiro e o cinema*. Rodrigues asserts, on the one hand, that commercial films set in the late colonial period like *Vendaval maravilhoso* (1949), *O despertar da redentora* (1942), *Sinha moça* (1953), and *João Negrinho* (1958) are centered around the figure of the slave, which was a numerical minority of Afro-Brazilians by the time Princess Isabel signed the 1888 Lei Áurea that emancipated the remaining approximately 750,000 Brazilian slaves. On the other hand, later films by Cinema Novo directors set centuries earlier, in the early colonial period, when slaves were indeed the majority of the Afro-Brazilian population—including *Ganga Zumba* (1963), *Xica da Silva* (1976), *Quilombo* (1984), and *Chico Rei* (1985)—center almost exclusively around quilombolas, or maroons.¹³ Measured (in admittedly reflectionist fashion) against the indisputable facts of Brazilian slave society, these trends in cinematic representation present Rodrigues with a certain puzzle.

Why the preference for narratives about slaves and quilombolas over the stories of free black men and women and manumitted slaves? Rodrigues does not exactly have an answer to this question except to make the provocative point that to the extent that both sets of filmmakers—the *Cinema Novistas* such as Walter Lima Jr. and Carlos Diegues that have focused on the quilombolas and those responsible for the saccharine 40s and 50s treatments of slaves living in *senzalas* (slave quarters)—participate in this “distortion” of the historical record they “appear to indicate that the path of a defeated separatism is more compensatory than the general Brazilian messiness [of race relations].”¹⁴ The “separatism” implied by the *senzala* and the quilombo, though in different ways, avoid, in Rodrigues’ view, the complexity of the Brazilian racial scene. Presumably, he means to suggest that the freed black and freed mixed-race person living in colonial society symbolizes the exceptionalism of the Brazilian racial past and present, and that, perhaps, the ambiguities of this figure’s position in society is the key to understanding race in Brazil.

¹² João Carlos Rodrigues, “Novas Visões Do Negro Brasileiro E O Cinema,” *Revista Do Patrimônio Histórico E Artístico Nacional* 25--*Negro Brasileiro Negro*, ed. José Rufino Santos (Brasília: IPHAN, 1997). All translations of Rodrigues’ text are mine.

¹³ Ibid; Rodrigues, *O Negro Brasileiro E O Cinema*.

¹⁴ Rodrigues, “Novas Visões Do Negro Brasileiro E O Cinema,” 92.

Rodrigues' implied stance *against* "separatism" clearly gets its impetus less from the films of the 40s and 50s than from the recent treatments of quilombolas by the *Cinema Novistas*; they are his real target. For, unlike the filmmakers of the 40s and 50s, the *Cinema Novistas* had political aspirations. How these politicized filmmakers chose to address the crucial *political* question of race in Brazilian society is of paramount interest not only to those interested in political cinema, but also to those, like Rodrigues himself, dedicated to the redress of the black image in Brazilian film and media. The subterranean question addressed by Rodrigues is why these political filmmakers turned to historical themes—indeed, to the colonial period—in their attempts to confront Brazilian race relations. While criticizing Rodrigues' allegiance to the 'positive'/'negative' images approach to the analysis of film history,¹⁵ Robert Stam, in *Tropical Multiculturalism*, has noted the same preference for historical themes. And like Rodrigues, Stam too connects this preference to a certain inclination toward "folklorization" at the expense of what he calls "domestication"—"that is, portrayals of people in their routine, daily lives."¹⁶ Stam writes, "[S]cores of Brazilian films show black people participating in *candomblé* and carnival and *quilombos*, yet many films depict racism under slavery, few depict contemporary

¹⁵ Stam is generally positive about Rodrigues' efforts in his book, issuing perhaps a backhanded compliment by comparing his work to that of Donald Bogle's *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies & Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Film*, first published in 1973. Like Bogle, Rodrigues identifies recurring stereotypes in Brazilian films; rather than the five distinct stereotypes observed by Bogle in U.S. cinema, Rodrigues diagnoses twelve in Brazilian cinema. While Stam acknowledges that Rodrigues' typology is "enormously informative, useful, and suggestive" (336), he ultimately criticizes it, on its own terms, for "blurring and redundancy" (337), arguing that the typology is "striking heterogeneous" (337) (in a conceptually confused way) because while some of the categories "constitute stereotypes in the classical sense, others...are literary archetypes, others... have to do with place of social origin, and still others...have to do with narrative function" (337). Stam further takes issue with Rodrigues' methodological approach: "Apart from the technical 'bugs' in such a schema, however, it seems necessary to go beyond the concept of stereotypes and the corollary notions of 'positive' and 'negative' images" (337). Rodrigues' fealty to this approach undergirds most of his work and is manifested in the excerpts from it that I quote later in this chapter. For his part, Rodrigues was not pleased with Stam's assessment, beginning the latest 2001 edition of *O Negro Brasileiro e o Cinema* with this pointed rebuttal: "One of the inquiries most frequently made about Brazilian cinema by black [Brazilian] intellectuals and artists is why our films do not present individualized, realistic characters, but rather, only archetypes and/or caricatures: "the slave," "the sambista [musician]," "the mulatta." The accusation is pertinent, in spite of the fact that modern Brazilian cinema prefers in general characters of that sort, schematic or symbolic, black of not.... Those archetypes [derived from Afro-Brazilian divinities]...end up, one way or another, influencing Art and artists. It has always seemed a shame to me that Brazilian psychoanalysts and psychologists have not looked into the matter, which escapes the scope of this book, even if it is its correlate. An American Brazilianist interested in cinema, Robert Stam, in his interesting book *Tropical Multiculturalism*—1997—, showed a similar insensibility to that question, even considering my position, publicly made for almost 30 years in journal articles and in the first edition of this book, 'clumsy,' surely because he [Stam] lacks experience and knowledge of the matter. He did not hesitate, however, to imitate [copy] other conclusions of my work in the structure of his piece, with a voracity that escapes the usual ethics in his country of origin" (30, translation mine). While this is not exactly a reply to the content of Stam's criticisms, it does manage to get off the hook by turning to some familiar defense strategies. First, it accuses Stam of U.S. cultural imperialism and, second, of unacknowledged reproduction of Rodrigues' own conclusions. Perhaps in this second defense Rodrigues is not entirely off the mark as Stam does concur with Rodrigues about the Brazilian cinema's turn to history. On the other hand, Stam could have arrived at this conclusion on the basis of his own investigations. For Stam's treatment of Rodrigues, see Stam, *Tropical Multiculturalism : A Comparative History of Race in Brazilian Cinema and Culture*. For an extensive critique of the 'positive'/'negative' images approach to film studies, see Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism : Multiculturalism and the Media* (London ; New York: Routledge, 1994). For Rodrigues' reply to Stam, see Rodrigues, *O Negro Brasileiro E O Cinema*.

¹⁶ Stam, *Tropical Multiculturalism : A Comparative History of Race in Brazilian Cinema and Culture* 338.

racism. If some cinemas are guilty of a flight *from* history, Brazilian cinema has occasionally been guilty of a flight *into* history, opting for gloriously remote triumphs while shying away from contemporary struggles.”¹⁷ Rodrigues elaborates this point in his essay. For him, there is an implication that the defender of “separatism” is compelled by this allegiance to troll the historical past for characteristics of the Afro-Brazilian’s “ancestral culture.” Implicitly, for Rodrigues, it is an ideological commitment—to discrete ethnicity, to “separatism”—that ultimately explains the backward glance of the *Cinema Novistas* (and the films of the 40s and 50s) and thereby justifies the space dedicated in Rodrigues’ essay to the paradox of historical filmic representations of Afro-Brazilians in the *colonial* period. The dilemma the “separatist” faces is one in which to update the representation, to make it contemporary rather than historical, would force him to “modernize” the black Brazilian. But with modernization comes a loss of “ancestral cultural characteristics”;¹⁸ and the loss of such characteristics is the loss of a discrete ethnicity. Presumably Rodrigues thinks that it is to this discrete Afro-Brazilian ethnicity that the *Cinema Novistas* are ultimately dedicated. Thus he writes,

The preference of the media and the *intelligentsia* for the more African and dionysian side of the Brazilian black person to the detriment of the more intellectualized and apollonian, could lead to an impoverished and stereotyped deformation.... To limit the black intellectual to the atabaque [a small wood Afro-Brazilian hand drum used in *capoeira* and *candomblé*], to the inhame [yam] and to dendê [palm oil] in the era of the computer, in the name of a root traditionalism, is not merely an error, but a real crime with a racial basis that the community should not tolerate.¹⁹

At bottom, Rodrigues’ accusation is familiar to us from critiques of traditional anthropology that accuse the Western anthropologists of seeking the “other” in a place and time prior to his own, of denying his own co-evalness with the object of his gaze, of pursuing the pure and unadulterated “other” untouched by “civilization” and unchanged by the passage of time, of treating culture as though it were a possession, like a

¹⁷ Ibid. (italics his). At another point in the text, Stam makes a similar and provocative point, this time adding a comparative angle: “In the United States and Brazil, as illustrated by the success of *Roots* in the former country and of *A Escrava Isaura* [The Slave Girl Isaura, a 1980s *telenovela*] in the latter, black historical subjects have at times provided the key to domestic and international popularity” (78).

¹⁸ Rodrigues, “Novas Visões Do Negro Brasileiro E O Cinema,” 92.

¹⁹ Ibid. 92-3. (italics his)

shoe or a sock is for the Western anthropologist. In other words, the choice of historical themes by the *Cinema Novistas* seeking to address the question of race in Brazil is not accidental; rather, it owes to a still unexorcized stagism. While it may be true that Afro-Brazilian ethnicity in the hands of these filmmakers is valorized, the very fact that the secret of blackness is to be found in the historical past betrays, at bottom, a racist essentializing gesture.²⁰

But the story does not end here. The preoccupation with the quilombo would eventually migrate to the national political scene as the Brazilian State neutralized the “separatist” zeitgeist through the canonization of Zumbi dos Palmares, the leader of the most important quilombo of Brazilian history, Palmares. Rodrigues approvingly notes “the transformation of Zumbi dos Palmares into a national hero of epic proportions” on par with Tiradentes, leader of the Inconfidência Mineira, the late eighteenth-century Brazilian revolutionary movement that sought independence from Portugal.²¹ Rodrigues perceives in the nationalization of Zumbi a double significance. First, it “resolves the metaphoric problem of political separatism” by transforming a symbol of Afro-Brazilian efforts to establish polities that would challenge the colonial state into a symbol of a shared national history, and thereby, a triumph for the Brazilian state.²² This nationalization of Zumbi, an antidote to the “separatist” fixation on the quilombo phenomenon, is manifested, according to Rodrigues, in two more recent exemplars from Brazilian media—the 1984 film, *Quilombo* (also by Diegues), and the 1996 mini series for educational television, *Zumbi, rei de Palmares* by the telenovela veteran Walter Avancini—both of which depict a multiracial and multicultural Palmares.²³ So much for a black state in the hills.

One virtue of Rodrigues’ observation is that it makes clear how unnatural the nationalization process can be. It is telling that fifty years before Zumbi’s emergence as national hero, the black national hero of children’s school textbooks was a contemporary of Zumbi’s, Henrique Dias, who had fought against the

²⁰ For a critique of anthropological knowledge, see Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other : How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

²¹ Rodrigues, “Novas Visões Do Negro Brasileiro E O Cinema.” For a critique of racism in ethnographic film, see Fatimah Tobing Rony, *The Third Eye : Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996).

²² Rodrigues, “Novas Visões Do Negro Brasileiro E O Cinema,” 92.

²³ Ibid.

Dutch at the Battle of Guararapes in 1648 and had been honored for his bravery by none other than the King of Portugal.²⁴

The second significant feature of the nationalization of Zumbi is that it makes more conspicuous the seeming idiosyncrasy of the filmic preoccupation with quilombos. If the *Cinema Novistas* were really after the compensatory promise of black separatism, why was it the quilombo, and Palmares in particular, that captured their imagination? Why did cinema fasten on the quilombo, rather than the Muslim Malê slave rebellion of 1835 (described by the historian João José Reis as “the most effective urban slave rebellion ever to occur on the American continent”),²⁵ or the repatriation of Afro-Brazilians to Africa, or black participation in the genocidal Paraguayan war against the *Guarani* nation, or the 1910 rebellion of black sailors protesting military corporal punishment, or the story of the Frente Negra Brasileira?²⁶

One obvious objection to Rodrigues’ framework is that it depends almost entirely for its force on his buried reflectionist premises—on the assumptions (a) that historical representation should be adequate to the historical record and (b) that a disavowal of fidelity to historical facts should be read symptomatically. The symptom Rodrigues detects is an ideological allegiance among the filmmakers to “separatism.”

In what follows, I will dispute Rodrigues’ account of the symptom (i.e. separatism), but I basically share his methodological framework, and this requires a few words of defense. Rodrigues’ animating observation about films depicting the colonial period gains its relevance from the fact that he characterizes a trend and not a few isolated instances. The trend’s capacity to indicate something about the preoccupations of the broader society seems actually a modest claim and justifiable; surely there is a link between a society and its artistic production and surely, in particular cases, some specific things may be said about those links. Furthermore, to read divergences between the received historical record and artistic rendering of historical events symptomatically does not commit us to complacency before the “accurate” representation of the past.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ João José Reis, *Slave Rebellion in Brazil : The Muslim Uprising of 1835 in Bahia*, Johns Hopkins Paperbacks ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) xiii.

²⁶ Rodrigues, “Novas Visões Do Negro Brasileiro E O Cinema.”; Rodrigues, *O Negro Brasileiro E O Cinema*.

Historical representation in art is always a problem; but obvious departures from the official record aggressively announce their puzzles, making them topics for investigation.

Rodrigues' paradox maps the terrain of investigation; he confronts us with three related questions about Afro-Brazilian representation in Brazilian cinema: Why the preference for depicting the figure of the quilombola and the space of the quilombo? Why the turn to the historical past? And why the cinematic neglect of other instances of black "separatism" like the Malê slave rebellion? While the ideological commitment to a discrete Afro-Brazilian cultural identity may seem to answer the first two questions, it surely cannot answer the third, because, were "separatism" really the ideological key, then the Malê slave rebellion should have been a perfect candidate for representation. This suggests that it remains an open question why Brazilian cinema has turned to the quilombo so often in its efforts to address the issue of race in Brazilian society.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will attempt to answer part of this question by reconstructing the career of the quilombo of Palmares and its leader, Zumbi, in historical writing, in the dramatic and cinematic arts, and in its migration into the sphere of racial politics. The rise of Zumbi and Palmares as important symbols in Brazilian politics had three stages. In the first stage, the history of Palmares was rehabilitated by Brazilian Marxist historians interested in instances of class struggle from the past. In the second stage, Zumbi was adopted by the black movement, which was trying to find ways to mobilize Afro-Brazilians against the ideology of racial democracy. For the black movement, Zumbi was a symbol of resistance to racial inequality and Palmares represented a utopian African state transplanted to the New World. In the third stage, Palmares and Zumbi were effectively "nationalized."²⁷ The democratized Brazilian state adopted Zumbi as a national hero and NGO's—national and international—began to fund historical and archaeological research on quilombos.²⁸

²⁷ For more on the long history of nationalization of ethnic signifiers in Brazil, see Peter Fry, *Para Inglês ver: identidade e política na cultura Brasileira*. Rio de Janeiro: Zahar, 1982; Michael Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power: The Movimento Negro of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, Brazil, 1945-1988*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994; Livio Sansone, *Blackness without Ethnicity: Constructing Race in Brazil*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

²⁸ For more on archaeological research on Palmares, see the work of Pedro Paulo Funari including Pedro Paulo A. Funari, Martin Hall and S. Jones, *Historical Archaeology : Back from the Edge*, One World Archaeology ; 31 (London ; New York: Routledge, 1999); Funari and Carvalho, *Palmares, Ontem E Hoje*.

IV

The historiography of Palmares may be divided into two parts: the period from Palmares' demise in the late seventeenth century to the publication of Édison Carneiro's 1947 text, *O quilombo dos Palmares (1630-1695)*, and the period that followed that publication.²⁹ Sebastião Rocha Pita, an influential pro-slavery historian of Brazil, wrote extensively about Palmares' destruction in his 1730 *Historia da America Portuguesa*. In this work, he recognizes the heroism of Palmares' leader Zumbi and describes Palmares as a well-ordered, "rustic republic."³⁰ Still, he rejoices in its defeat by the formidable "Portuguese army." For almost two centuries following Rocha Pita's assessment, the history of Palmares was reduced to a footnote; according to the historian, Mário Maestri, the "events of Palmares history lost historiographic status."³¹ Mid-nineteenth century historians of Brazil—including the German Heinrich Handelmann and Francisco Afolfo de Varnhagen—followed Rocha Pita's lead, recapitulating the events and significance of Palmares history as they had been rendered by the latter.³² Pre-abolition (i.e. pre-1888) historical accounts of the Palmares episode affirmed four basic "facts": first, the military brilliance of the forces that eventually defeated Palmares; second, the African character of the quilombo (e.g. Handelmann wrote of "an [A]frican colony" permeating the European slave states);³³ third, the quilombo's republican political character (i.e. along these lines Handelmann referred to it as a "black state");³⁴ and fourth, that the quilombo represented an intolerable threat to Brazilian civilization and progress and that its destruction was necessary for the latter's unfolding (i.e. again Handelmann worried about the quilombo's "africanization" of all of Alagoas and the mortal danger such africanization posed for the white colonization).³⁵

The first post-abolition, modern study of Palmares by the positivist physician and criminologist, Raimundo Nina Rodrigues, brought some new developments in Palmares historiography; these were

²⁹ Maestri, "Benjamin Péret: Un Olhar Heterodoxo Sobre Palmares," 49. What follows is mostly a summary of Maestri's essay, though I footnote anyway. All translations of Maestri's text are mine.

³⁰ Ibid. 48.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid. 49.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

announced in the very title of his 1905 newspaper article “A Tróia negra. Erros e lacunas da história de Palmares.” Despite Nina Rodrigues’ entrenched eugenicist orientation, he would be credited by contemporary historians with helping to usher in a new, positive posture toward Afro-Brazilian symbols and culture and with influencing a generation of folklorists and anthropologists including Édison Carneiro.³⁶ Relying on older official histories, on first hand chronicles of the Dutch expeditions against Palmares, and on primary documents from seventeenth-century publications, Nina Rodrigues shed light on certain details of Palmares political organization and its demise at the hands of Domingos Jorge Velho. According to Maestri, his main ideological intervention was a reevaluation of the republican political character of Palmares, affirming the despotic character of Palmares governance, which was a transplant from Africa that constituted nothing like a “republic.”³⁷ Echoing the assessments of the historians of the previous centuries, Nina Rodrigues asserts that “Least disputable of all is the relevant service rendered by the Portuguese and colonial armies that destroyed all at once the greatest threat to the civilization of the future Brazilian people, in that new Haiti, unamenable to progress and inaccessible to civilization, that a victorious Palmares would have planted in the heart of Brazil.”³⁸ For Nina Rodrigues, the quilombo of Palmares represented a return to a temporally prior stage of African barbarism and a renunciation of the blessings of civilization. The slant that Nina Rodrigues adds to the prior accounts, which were explicitly sympathetic to slavery, is a commitment not to the slave regime in particular, but to the implications of the stagist theories of Auguste Comte and the social darwinism of Herbert Spencer—namely, that colonial slave society was developmentally ahead of barbarous African tribal transplants along an evolutionary path to civilization. It was in the name of progress and civilization that Nina Rodrigues heralded the triumph against Palmares. Central to this framework, embedded in its logic, was the conviction that quilombos were an indisputably African phenomenon, and the corollary conviction that African cultural and political formations, regardless of where they were found, belonged to a prior historical moment.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Quoted in Ibid. 54.

The tone of Palmares historiography would shift dramatically in 1947 with the publication of Édison Carneiro's book, *O quilombo de Palmares*. Its publication represented the official passage of Palmares historiography from the hands of the political right to those of the political left. In Carneiro's grasp this historical episode gained a political urgency that it had been missing before. For thirty years, Carneiro's book would serve as the reference point for Palmares historiography and a primary source for representations of Palmares in art.³⁹

Carneiro was a Bahian scholar of Afro-Brazilian cultures with close ties to the Brazilian Communist Party. Like the previous accounts of Nina Rodrigues and others, Carneiro argued that quilombos in general were "negative reactions" to slavery, to its "extermination of their [the slave's] language, religion, and [African] lifestyle."⁴⁰ The quilombo represented a rejection of slavery more than an alternative societal formation.⁴¹ Carneiro's interpretation of quilombos—like the interpretations of his predecessor, Nina Rodrigues, and Artur Ramos—is generally considered to be culturalist.⁴² The culturalist interpretation had it that the quilombo phenomenon was ultimately "anti-acculturative," that fugitive slaves were fundamentally fighting to preserve African traditions in the face of the colonial *cultural* threat.⁴³ Still, unlike all the previous treatments, Carneiro refused to celebrate the destruction of Palmares and rejected the previously peddled argument that it had been necessary for the survival of the future Brazilian civilization.⁴⁴

Because Carneiro was committed to a particular understanding of the Brazilian colonial social formation, he refused certain of the assessments of his Brazilian Communist Party (PCB) comrades like Astrojildo Pereira, the founder of the PCB in 1925 and friend to whom the first edition of Carneiro's text was dedicated, who argued in the 1929 PCB pamphlet, *A Classe Operária (The Working Class)*, that quilombos, and Palmares in particular, represented the "an authentic class conflict" between masters and slaves.⁴⁵ For

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Carneiro quoted in Flávio dos Santos Gomes, "Ainda Sobre Os Quilombos: Repensando a Construção De Símbolos De Indentidade Étnica No Brasil," *Política E Cultura: Visões Do Passado E Perspectivas Contemporâneas*, eds. Elisa Reis, Maria Hermínia Tavares de Almeida and Peter Fry (São Paulo: Editora Hucitec, 1996) 199. (translation mine)

⁴¹ Maestri, "Benjamin Péret: Un Olhar Heterodoxo Sobre Palmares."

⁴² See Gomes, "Ainda Sobre Os Quilombos: Repensando a Construção De Símbolos De Indentidade Étnica No Brasil."

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Maestri, "Benjamin Péret: Un Olhar Heterodoxo Sobre Palmares."

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Carneiro, who subscribed to a rigidly teleological, national-populist account of Brazilian history, the fundamental social contradiction of the pre-Abolition era was between large landowners and poor, free men. On this view, the motor of history pre-1888 was the activity of poor, free men; Carneiro did not see how a victory by Palmares and the slaves could have “advanced the history of the Brazilian national formation.”⁴⁶

This reading of Brazilian history was standard on the Brazilian left in the 40s and 50s. It owes in large part to the popular-front policies promoted by the Comintern after 1935 and to a Stalinist stagist account of historical development that followed from Stalin’s commitment to the viability of “socialism in one country.” On the stagist view, societies cannot skip stages along the way to socialism, so that primitive communism gives way to classical slave society, which gives way to feudalism, which gives way to capitalism, which gives way to socialism. The debate around stagism centered on the question whether a dictatorship of the proletariat could carry out the bourgeois democratic reforms—i.e. development of productive forces, urbanization, education, the emergence of a democratic political habits—that were the precondition for socialism, or whether the cooperation of the bourgeoisie was necessary. If the cooperation of the bourgeoisie was not necessary, that would effectively mean that the capitalist stage could be skipped. This was the view defended by Trotsky in his theory of permanent revolution. Stalin’s support for national-democratic revolutions led by a national bourgeoisie resulted, around the world, in Communist party compromises with bourgeois political entities in their joint pursuit of “development,” which for the Communists at least, constituted a precondition for socialist revolution. This was the case in Brazil.

In Brazilian Communist Party intellectual circles, a further consequence of the Stalinist commitment to this sort of stagism was a particular reading of Brazilian national history that affirmed its recently feudal character. Colonial society operated within a feudal mode of production. After all, if colonial Brazil were not feudal but capitalist (as the dependency school would argue a decade later), then the only revolution yet to be made would be a socialist one and not a bourgeois-democratic one. The net result of these calculations, the historian Maestri argues, was that Édison Carneiro, burrowed in the bosom of the PCB, believed that the

⁴⁶ Ibid. 59.

motor of Brazilian history before 1888, the great class conflict of colonial society, was a classically feudal one between large landowners and free poor men.⁴⁷

V

In 1956, another committed Marxist, Benjamin Péret (1899-1959), published an essay titled ‘O que foi Palmares?’ in a São Paulo cultural magazine, *Revista Anhembi*, an essay that responded to Carneiro’s work. Péret was a French surrealist poet who had spent three years in Brazil from 1929 to 1931. He wrote the Palmares essay during his return visit to Brazil in 1955, ostensibly for the wedding of his son, a son he had with a Brazilian singer, Elsie Houston, whom he had met and married in Paris in the late 1920s.⁴⁸

During Péret’s first sojourn in Brazil, he participated both in cultural activities, publishing in *Revista de Antropofagia*, and in political activities, for example, co-founding the Trotskyist group, *Liga Comunista de Brasil*.⁴⁹ When Péret first arrived in Rio de Janeiro in 1929, he was embraced by the Anthropophagist intellectuals he had met and befriended in Paris a few years earlier including the editor and founder of *Revista de Antropofagia*, Oswald de Andrade,⁵⁰ who announced the surrealist’s presence in Brazil with these remarks published in the magazine in 1929:⁵¹ “In São Paulo is Benjamin Péret, the great figure of Parisian Surrealism. We should not forget that Surrealism is one of the best pre-anthropophagic movements. The liberation of man as such, through the dictates of the unconscious and of turbulent personal displays, was without a doubt one of the most exciting spectacles for any anthropophagic heart that in these last years has followed the desperation of the civilized. [...] After Surrealism, only Anthropophagia.”⁵² Not all the Brazilian *modernistas*

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Carlos Augusto Calil, "Tradutores De Brasil," *Brasil, 1920-1940: Da Antropofagia a Brasília*, ed. Jorge Schwartz (São Paulo: Cosac & Naify, 2002).

⁴⁹ M. Elizabeth Ginway, "Benjamin Péret and Brazilian Modernism," *Hispania* 75.3 (1992).

⁵⁰ Anthropophagism was a movement within Brazilian modernism. It emerged around 1924 with the publication of the “Brazil-Wood Manifesto” by Oswald de Andrade, its central figure. The anthropophagist movement appropriated the metaphor of cannibalism to ground a new, national-cosmopolitan aesthetics/politics that rejected the imitation of European models. Besides Oswald de Andrade, other important figures include writers Mário de Andrade, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, and painter Tarsila do Amaral. Brazilian modernism is thought to have had three phases: Anthropophagism belonged to the first phase, from 1922 to 1930; the second phase lasted from 1930-1945; and the third phase—its aesthetic, formalist phase—lasted from about 1945 through the 70s.

⁵¹ Ginway, "Benjamin Péret and Brazilian Modernism."

⁵² Quoted in Calil, "Tradutores De Brasil."

were as enthusiastic about Péret's presence in Brazil.⁵³ Mario de Andrade and Carlos Drummond de Andrade reacted negatively to Péret and to Oswald de Andrade for the magazine's celebratory reception of the French surrealist. In fact, Carlos Drummond broke with the *Revista de Antropofagia* because of Péret, reportedly quipping that he could still not cannibalize this Péret, a surrealist and a Frenchman.⁵⁴ Péret, for his part, was not particularly bent on becoming a shining light of the Brazilian *modernista* scene, insisting in an interview that "the objective of his trip to Brazil was absolutely not to give talks, but rather to visit the interior of the country, primarily the states of Mato Grosso, Goiás and Amazonas, attracted by their natural beauties and their Indians."⁵⁵

Interestingly, Péret's first stay in Brazil was taken up not with work done on Brazil's Indians, but rather on Afro-Brazilian history and culture. Péret published a series of thirteen articles between the end of 1930 and the beginning of 1931 in *Diário da Noite* titled "Candomblé e Makumba." In the series, Péret found himself trying to negotiate between a valorization of the marvelous elements of "makumba" and his general distaste for religious devotion of any kind: "It is not without some misgivings that I am going to approach a subject as unexpected as that of African religions in Brazil. I shall consider them primarily from the poetic viewpoint, since, unlike what has happened with other more evolved religions, they exude a wild, primitive poetry that for me is almost a revelation."⁵⁶ On the other hand, in another of the articles he declares, "Let us await the downfall of all the decomposing gods and christs! Long live mankind, free and simple!"⁵⁷

During his time in Brazil he also produced a manuscript that would ultimately result in his expulsion from the country. The work, titled, *O almirante negro*, was a historical piece about the 1910 "Cane Mutiny" (Revolt of the Whip) led by a son of ex-slaves, the sailor João Cândido Felisberto, against the national navy for

⁵³ Throughout this chapter I will usually refer to Brazilian "*modernismo*" or to Brazilian "*modernistas*" rather than to Brazilian modernism or modernists. I do this because it had become a convention meant to signal the distinctiveness of Brazilian *modernismo* as compared to its European counterparts. The point I gather is not to turn Brazilian *modernismo* into a peripheral, imitative modernism.

⁵⁴ Robert Ponge, "Notas Sobre a Recepção E Presença Do Surrealismo No Brasil Nos Anos 192-1950," *Aleia* 6.1 (2004): 58; Ginway, "Benjamin Péret and Brazilian Modernism." For more on Mário de Andrade and Carlos Drummond de Andrade's criticisms of surrealism, see Heitor Martins, "Canibais Europeus E Antropófagos Brasileiros," *Oswald De Andrade E Outros* (São Paulo: Conselho Estadual de Cultura, 1973).

⁵⁵ Quoted in Calil, "Tradutores De Brasil."

⁵⁶ Benjamin Péret, "Candomblé and Macumba," *Ibid.* 620.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Carlos Augusto Calil, "Tradutores De Brasil," *Ibid.*, ed. Jorge Schwartz.

its common practice of corporal punishment for minor sailor infractions.⁵⁸ The government of Getúlio Vargas accused Péret of being a communist agitator (he had a mimeograph machine in his home) and of having audaciously weaseled his way into the Armed Forces and government archives with the intention of “obtaining information.”⁵⁹ The manuscript was confiscated and destroyed, and Péret was sent back to France.⁶⁰

Upon his return to Brazil in June 1955, Péret set about realizing the thwarted aims of the previous trip. He traveled to Bahia, Amazonas, Mato Grosso, and Pará and spent time with the Xavante and Carajás indigenous peoples.⁶¹ But just as during the previous trip, it was not about Indians that Péret ended up writing. Again he wrote about Afro-Brazilian history, this time recounting the story of the great quilombo of Palmares. In his 1956 text, provocatively titled *Que foi o quilombo de Palmares?* [What was the Quilombo of Palmares?], Péret appropriated most of the facts of Palmares history that had been uncovered by Carneiro in his 1947 work. Péret was not interested in archival labors; his intervention would be of an ideological nature; his target turned out to be Carneiro. In the piece, Péret agrees with Carneiro that the destruction of Palmares was not a “triumph” for Brazilian civilization, but he pushes Carneiro’s assertion further. While Carneiro imagined that the “triumph” of Brazilian civilization had little to do with this episode, Péret, reversing Nina Rodrigues’ formulation, argued that this “triumph” would have been *hastened* rather than *derailed* by a Palmarino victory.⁶² Péret reasoned that the tensions that existed between the slave-holding class and the escaped slaves made the possibility of living side by side impossible. In other words, Palmares was a threat to the entire slave system. Palmarino survival depended on the demise of slavery; there could be no compromises. Had the Palmarinos, then, been able to recognize their shared interest with plantation slaves in bringing about the end of the slave regime, the entire mode of production would have come tumbling down.⁶³ It was for this reason that Péret rejected Carneiro’s assessment of the quilombo phenomenon as a

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ From Ginway, “Benjamin Péret and Brazilian Modernism,” 547. Originally quoted from a decree (signed by Vargas) in Sergio Lima’s essay “Je ne mange pas de ce pain-là” (published in the Brazilian surrealist magazine *A Phala* in 1967).

⁶⁰ Calil, “Tradutores De Brasil.”

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Maestri, “Benjamin Péret: Un Olhar Heterodoxo Sobre Palmares,” 68.

⁶³ Ibid.

“negative reaction” to slavery. If for Carneiro the quilombo was a “negation of official society,” a “reaffirmation of African culture and lifestyles,”⁶⁴ “a rudimentary and inferior form of resistance” (presumably because of its culturalist orientation),⁶⁵ for Péret, on the contrary, the quilombo represented a “positive” action, “one of the possible paths that could have hastened ‘significantly the abolition of slavery.’”⁶⁶

Carneiro’s left culturalist interpretive framework was replaced by a new materialist framework.⁶⁷ Moreover, Péret was able to argue, against Carneiro, and recuperating the 1929 pre-Stalinized view of PCB founder Astrojildo Pereira, that the conflict of pre-Abolition society was indeed the conflict between slaves and masters, and that Palmares represented the vanguard of that struggle.⁶⁸ With this assertion came an implicit disavowal of the feudal or semi-feudal character of colonial Brazilian society. Péret had stumbled on a solution, which would be widely adopted only decades later, to the stalemate in the debate among Brazilian historians about whether colonial Brazil was feudal/semi-feudal or whether it was capitalist (the thesis defended later by the dependency school). Péret’s formulation of the central class conflict of pre-abolition society as being one between masters and slaves implied that Brazilian colonial society operated within an entirely new mode of production. This new mode of production, which came to be known as the “colonial slave mode of production,” was authoritatively elaborated in *O escravismo colonial* [Colonial Slavery], written by the Bahian Marxist historian, Jacob Gorender, in 1978.⁶⁹ The eminent contemporary historian of the colonial period in Brazil, Stuart Schwartz, also confirms Péret’s intuition. Deriving inspiration from Marx’s lesson that social relations of production are the “innermost secrets, the hidden basis of the entire social structure,”⁷⁰ Schwartz eloquently affirms the centrality of slavery in colonial Brazil: “The penetration of slavery into every aspect of life, its ability to order the society and influence the behavior of not only masters and slaves but also

⁶⁴ Carneiro quoted in Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid. 71.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ For more on the culturalist/materialist divide in quilombo historiography, see the excellent essay by Gomes, “Ainda Sobre Os Quilombos: Repensando a Construção De Símbolos De Indentidade Étnica No Brasil.”

⁶⁸ Maestri, “Benjamin Péret: Un Olhar Heterodoxo Sobre Palmares.”

⁶⁹ Ibid. For more on Jacob Gorender and the “colonial slave mode of production,” see Mário Maestri, “O Escravismo Colonial: A Revolução Copernicana De Jacob Gorender [Primeira Parte],” *Revista Espaço Acadêmico* 35.April (2004).

⁷⁰ From Marx’s *Capital*, quoted in Stuart B. Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society : Bahia, 1550-1835*, Cambridge Latin American Studies ; 52 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 258.

bureaucrats and peasants, freed people and free whites, browns, and blacks—this was the power of the institution. No action could be taken, no decision made, no thought expressed without at least tacit recognition of the dominant labor form and the servile population it had created.”⁷¹ Péret’s most significant intervention in the area of Palmares historiography—Maestri calls it a “kind of Copernican revolution”⁷²—was the way he recentered the figure of the slave, making him—and not the (non-existent) proletariat of the towns or the poor, free men working the land of others—the agent of social transformation. Most significantly, the quilombo represented the heights of his agency.⁷³ Péret’s adjustments to Carneiro’s work would be reproduced in the Palmares historiography of the following decades. Décio Freitas in 1984 and Ivan Alves Filho in 1988, both Marxists, wrote authoritative histories of Palmares committed to the idea that Palmares represented a crucial experience in the history of class struggle in Brazil.

VI

I have expended considerable space on Benjamin Péret and his immediate predecessors because his essay, “Que foi o quilombo de Palmares?”, would ultimately serve as the bridge between the world of the social sciences (e.g. history, folklore, anthropology) and the world of the dramatic and cinematic arts. Péret’s peculiar and original treatment of the historical episode would mark subsequent artistic treatments of Palmares, which have largely sided with Péret against Carneiro in treating Palmares as the culmination of an “authentic class conflict.” What seems indisputable in any account of how the history of Palmares migrated to, and eventually rose to prominence within, the sphere of cultural production is that the appropriation of

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Maestri, “Benjamin Péret: Un Olhar Heterodoxo Sobre Palmares,” 69.

⁷³ Maestri points out that Péret did not really think that Palmares could have brought down the entire slave regime. First, Péret thought that the forces of production in Palmares were too rudimentary. Second, Péret is painfully aware of the lack of class consciousness among the quilombolas—that is, the quilombos would have needed to galvanize their counterparts still enslaved on the plantations in order to bring about abolition. Because the quilombolas did not think of themselves as a class of slaves “for itself,” they missed this opportunity. According to Péret, there were several reasons for this including that slavery had nurtured a very individualized conception of life, that the slave population was incredibly culturally heterogeneous, that the quilombolas were so outmatched in terms of resources and economic development that a rout may have seemed guaranteed. But Péret maintains that even if a rebellion organized by the quilombolas to include the plantation slaves had been defeated, still such a defeated rebellion would have accelerated abolition in Brazil. Maestri points out that Péret was the first to broach the issue of slave consciousness in Brazil. The greatest historical irony is that while for Péret the Palmarinos in particular, and quilombolas in general, suffered from a deficit of consciousness, for those who would later use Palmares to build race consciousness, this reading of the failure of the Palmarinos to forge a collective consciousness was far from anyone’s mind. For more of Maestri’s critical account of Péret’s treatment of Palmarino consciousness, see Ibid. 68-71.

Palmares history by Marxist historians left an indelible mark on future artistic appropriation, which for the most part participated in the submerged debate simmering beneath the surface of the texts I have just summarized above.

Péret straddled the worlds of art and politics in what may seem, on the surface, an awkward balancing act. Michael Löwy, in *Morning Star: Surrealism, Marxism, Anarchism, Situationism, Utopia*, remarks that “Of all the Surrealists, he [Péret] was without a doubt the most committed to political action inside the workers’ and Marxist movements.”⁷⁴ To exemplify this commitment, Löwy cites in depth Péret’s article on Palmares. But the function of this treatment is not ultimately to cast doubt on Péret’s Surrealist credentials or to underline his exceptionalism, but rather, to illustrate Löwy’s more global point, that Surrealism is not so much an artistic school as a Romantic Revolutionary movement in revolt against industrial capitalism’s depredations of the human body and spirit. For the Surrealists, there was no contradiction between the worlds of politics and aesthetics: the Surrealist ambition to “re-enchant” the world, to “protest against narrow-minded rationality, the commercialization of life, petty-thinking, and the boring realism of our money-dominated industrial society” was nothing if not the “utopian and revolutionary aspiration to ‘transform life,’”⁷⁵ to transform society. According to Pierre Naville, a co-founder of Surrealism and leader of the Trotskyist Left Opposition, Surrealism and Communism coincided in their “revolutionary pessimism”—that is, in their embrace of the subjective factor in revolution over more objective determinants, in their “deeply held conviction that it is impossible to live as a human being worthy of that name without fighting fiercely and with unshakeable will against the established order.”⁷⁶ For Löwy, Péret is paradigm of Surrealism’s encompassing, desegregated spirit: “Péret’s body of work, like Breton’s...shows that in a strictly political sense Surrealism succeeded, through a process of alchemy that it secretly held, to forge into a single amulet revolt and revolution, Communism and freedom, utopia and the dialectic, action and dream.”⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Michael Löwy, *Morning Star : Surrealism, Marxism, Anarchism, Situationism, Utopia*, 1st ed. (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2009) 10.

⁷⁵ Ibid. 1.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 9.

⁷⁷ Ibid. 11.

Still, we can detect a certain anxiety about the status of Péret's essayistic writings on Brazilian culture and history in the work of local commentators, who work hard to see the surrealist traces in seemingly straightforwardly sociological, historical works. Robert Ponge, in the suggestively titled essay "Benjamin Péret: surrealista e historiador de Palmares," has a section called "Where the Surrealist Still Characterizes the Historian," in which he asks "What...aspects indicate that the article published by *Anhembi* is authored by a surrealist?"⁷⁸ Ponge cites three links. First, the essay makes reference to other historical events and figures including the Paris Commune of 1971, Danton, Saint-Just, Montezuma, Chiang Kai-Chek, and Charles Fourier. These references, according to Ponge, "have a precise function: serving sometimes as examples, in general as analogies."⁷⁹ This use of analogy in the article "is obviously symptomatic of the fact its author was a member of a current of thought—surrealism—that always devoted extreme interest to analogy."⁸⁰ Second, Ponge notes Péret's rejection of the notion that the ends justify the means, a Trotskyist position that influenced surrealism. Third, and perhaps most sound, is Ponge's claim that freedom is at the center of both Péret's text and Surrealism—remember Breton's declaration, in 1924: "The mere word 'freedom' is the only one that still excites me. I deem it capable of indefinitely sustaining the old human fanaticism. It doubtless satisfies my only legitimate aspiration."⁸¹ Péret's Palmares essay opens with these unmistakable lines: "Of all the sentiments that seethe in the heart of man, the longing for freedom is, certainly, one of the most urgent and its satisfaction is one of the essential conditions of existence. That is why when man sees himself deprived of it, he has no peace while he does not reconquer it, in this way history could limit itself to the study of attempts against freedom and the efforts of the oppressed to change the rules of the game that was imposed on them."⁸² A bit later Péret adds, "The blacks of the quilombo of Palmares aspired to that elementary freedom without which human existence has no meaning."⁸³

⁷⁸ Robert Ponge, "Benjamin Péret: Surrealista E Historiador De Palmares," *O Quilombo Dos Palmares*, eds. Robert Ponge and Mário Maestri (Porto Alegre: Editora da UFRGS, 2002). All translations of Ponge's text are mine.

⁷⁹ Ibid. 33.

⁸⁰ Ibid. 33-4.

⁸¹ André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969) 4. Partially quoted in Portuguese in Ponge, "Benjamin Péret: Surrealista E Historiador De Palmares."

⁸² Benjamin Péret, "Que Foi O Quilombo De Palmares?," *O Quilombo Dos Palmares*, eds. Robert Ponge and Mário Maestri (Porto Alegre: UFRGS, 2002) 81. Partially quoted in Portuguese in Ponge, "Benjamin Péret: Surrealista E Historiador De Palmares."

⁸³ Péret, "Que Foi O Quilombo De Palmares?," 83.

It is only with Ponge's last point that Löwy concurs. Indeed, in "Que foi o quilombo de Palmares?" Péret exhibits a "libertarian sensibility" as he "reinterprets the classic Marxist theses—class struggle as the battle of the exploited against their exploiters—from a libertarian standpoint. His essay is a road map...for an anthropology of freedom."⁸⁴ Interestingly, both Ponge and Löwy seem to proceed from the same sense that Péret's Palmares essay is somehow on the margins, a liminal case; both try to recuperate it for Surrealism. What is at stake in this recuperation? Why not just think that Péret had two sets of interests—art and politics—and that he pursued these interests in different arenas throughout his life. On this reading, Péret's writings on Palmares, the Cane Mutiny, and less obviously, *macumba*, emerge out of his political commitments, period. While Ponge seems to want to construct an internally consistent Péret by revealing the Palmares' essay's surrealist elements, Löwy seems to want to construct a politically active account of Surrealism by showing that Péret's essay does not merely have traces of surrealism, it incarnates, it exudes, the surrealist soul. Ultimately, Löwy wants to emphasize the faded political credentials of surrealism, and Ponge wants to contextualize Péret's contribution as one firmly belonging to the international art scene.

VII

Perhaps we could even go further and claim that Peret's contribution belonged to the Brazilian national art scene. After all, Péret did not publish in an historical or sociological or anthropological magazine; he published in a cultural magazine. *Anhembi* was founded in 1950 by Paulo Duarte—a journalist, ethnographer, folklorist, and defender of indigenous cultures. Péret knew Duarte from his first trip to Brazil in the late 1920s and had reciprocated Duarte's hospitality when Duarte was visiting Paris from 1932-1934 by introducing him and other Brazilians to André Breton.⁸⁵ *Revista Anhembi* was named for the indigenous name of the Tietê River, a river that begins in the southeastern state of São Paulo and empties into the Paraná River. The first issue discusses the journal's title. Before the Portuguese conquest, it had been used by

⁸⁴ Löwy, *Morning Star : Surrealism, Marxism, Anarchism, Situationism, Utopia* 11. For Löwy, this libertarian stain in Péret is nothing foreign to Surrealism; in fact, it is constitutive. Thus, "If Marxism was a decisive aspect of the political itinerary of Surrealism—especially during the first twenty years of the movement—it is far from the only one. Since the movement's inception, an anarchist, libertarian sensibility has run through Surrealists' political thought" (10).

⁸⁵ Ginway, "Benjamin Péret and Brazilian Modernism."

indigenous peoples as “their road into the interior,”⁸⁶ and its miles of banks had been occupied by numerous villages. After the conquest, explorers were led by the river to modern-day Paraguay, Peru, the Atlantic; it became a kind of “international South American travel route.”⁸⁷ Duarte hopes to make of the “Anhembi” an apt symbol of the “cultural penetration” that the magazine will pursue. Because rivers have no respect for national borders, because they observe only natural laws of flow and not man’s laws of demarcation—because of this, the referent of the “Anhembi” river represents mobility, travel, discovery, and the universalist spirit of nature. On the other hand, its sign, “Anhembi,” signals—in a way that the name “Tietê” could not—at once the geographic specificity of the people in whose language “Anhembi” is remembered and the temporal specificity of the historical moment before the world was carved up into discrete nation-states. In this act of naming, Duarte romantically recuperates, in a very *modernista* gesture, Brazil’s indigenous past, with its mobile, adventurous Indians for whom *possessing* nature—land, water, air—was anathema. Duarte seems to suggest that these nameless Indians were the first internationalists and the first explorers. And they were Brazilian! The first issue ends with this commitment, “Armed with a total nonconformism with the status quo, it [*Anhembi*] has the aim of collaborating in the seemingly impossible task of elevating the level of culture in Brazil, despite everything, to that of our splendid province in the common global Homeland, which is in a painful search for her unity.”⁸⁸ In effect, his editorial message embraces, simultaneously, the national and the cosmopolitan.

And indeed, *Revista Anhembi* was known for publishing many foreigners, of whom Péret was just one. It also published the work of several Brazilian *modernistas* including Sérgio Milliet, Ribeiro Couto, Murilo Mendes, Carlos Drummond de Andrade, even Oswald de Andrade, and of course, Mário de Andrade (author of the anthropophagic classic, *Macunaíma*), with whom Duarte was close friends (together they had co-founded the São Paulo Department of Culture in 1935).⁸⁹ But the journal’s relationship to Brazilian modernism was ultimately ambiguous—at once celebratory and mournfully nostalgic. In the view of

⁸⁶ Quoted in George Luiz França, “Anhembi: Revisitar E/Ou Antologizar?,” *XI Encontro Regional da ABRALIC* (São Paulo: XI Encontro Regional da ABRALIC--Literatura, Artes, Saberes, 2007), vol., 5.

⁸⁷ Quoted in *Ibid.*, vol.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, vol., 6.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, vol.

George Luiz França, *Anbemi* was retiring *modernismo*'s more exalted nationalism, exchanging it with a "universalist nationalism" advanced by Brazilians.⁹⁰

Upon Péret's return to Brazil in 1955, he found himself broke and in need of money. Ponge reasons that it is likely that *Anbemi* approached Péret about the Palmares piece, probably through Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes, a friend of Péret's and a future collaborator on the journal.⁹¹ Interestingly, Paulo Emílio Salles Gomes would become a major figure in the Brazilian cinema scene—as a professor, writer, and festival organizer.

Ponge and Maestri have both lamented the general neglect that Péret suffered in Brazilian cultural history, adding that Péret's Palmares essay "attained scarce repercussions within the Brazilian intellectual community."⁹² The evidence marshaled for this claim is twofold: first, it was not until the first bona fide Brazilian surrealist art exhibition (*I Exposição Surrealista no Brasil*) held in 1967 that Péret was recognized in a catalogue article by Sergio Lima for his contribution to Brazilian surrealism; the article was the first study of Péret written and published in Latin America. Second, despite a short letter that Carneiro wrote to *Anbemi* complaining only that Péret had not sufficiently cited his work and not engaging with any of Péret's substantive criticisms of Carneiro,⁹³ it was not until 1985 that the historian Clóvis Moura publicly acknowledged Péret's contribution to the historiography of Palmares.⁹⁴ While public recognition may not have been forthcoming, there is every reason to think that the penetration of Péret's essay, at the least in the art world, was far-reaching and profound. After all, *Anbemi* had access to the Brazilian cultural intelligentsia; besides a dedicated and broad readership, its editors had longstanding personal ties to Brazilian intellectuals.

⁹⁰ Ibid., vol., 6.

⁹¹ Ponge, "Benjamin Péret: Surrealista E Historiador De Palmares."

⁹² Mário Maestri, "Benjamin Péret: Un Olhar Heterodoxo Sobre Palmares," Ibid. 60; Ponge, "Benjamin Péret: Surrealista E Historiador De Palmares."; Ginway, "Benjamin Péret and Brazilian Modernism."

⁹³ Maestri's collection reproduces two letters to the editor of *Anbemi*, Paulo Duarte. The first is from Carneiro, dated May 24, 1956. Quite short, it accuses Péret of summarizing Carneiro's book (in about 20 pages of Péret's 40-page work). It complains that Péret does not make clear that his summary of the facts was based on Carneiro's book. Carneiro does not ultimately argue the substantive points of Péret's intervention or dispute Péret's criticisms of his own work. The second letter is from Péret, dated September 30, 1956. It responds to Carneiro's complaint. Péret explains that although he does cite Carneiro several times, one citation is indeed missing from the published version. This note would have read, "Édison Carneiro: *O quilombo de Palmares*... In the pages that follow, one will see a summary of this work, the most complete work published about this quilombo to-date." Translation of Péret's letter is mine. See Benjamin Péret, Robert Ponge and Mário José Maestri Filho, *O Quilombo Dos Palmares*, 1a. ed. (Porto Alegre, RS: UFRGS Editora, 2002). For an account of why Carneiro may have decided not to engage substantively with Péret, see Ponge, "Benjamin Péret: Surrealista E Historiador De Palmares."

⁹⁴ Ponge, "Benjamin Péret: Surrealista E Historiador De Palmares," 31.

That greater contemporary recognition of a foreigner, a Frenchman, not even a proper historian, a surrealist, a Trotskyist sympathizer, was not forthcoming may say more, Ponge suggests, about the tenor of Brazilian nationalism at the time than about Péret's actual influence.⁹⁵

VIII

But how might “Que foi o quilombo de Palmares?” have spoken to the artistic intelligentsia in 1956? Why did Péret turn back, after twenty years, to the theme of black rebellion in Brazil? And how might this new account have been understood in a post-*modernismo* moment? As I suggested above, it is not obvious that Péret's study was best suited for a cultural journal like *Anbemi*. Besides the affiliations of its author, the essay's main credentials seem to come from the shared primitivist strains in Surrealism, Brazilian *modernismo*, and Duarte's *Anbemi*. Looking at the history of Péret in Brazil, there is reason to think that it was surrealism's fascination with “primitive” cultures that first propelled Péret toward his early 1930 studies of *candomblé* and *macumba*, and the Cane Mutiny.

Emerging in the wake of the devastation of World War I, surrealism turned resolutely against the utilitarian rationality and technologization of modern life. In their pursuit of the irrational, the spontaneous, the magical, and the marvelous, many surrealists looked to the “evolutionarily backwards,” to “primitive” peoples for models and inspiration for how to “reenchant” the present, for ways to restore a sense of magic to contemporary life. They availed themselves of the myth, the fetish, the shaman, the occult, and the sacred.⁹⁶ But unlike the appropriations of “primitive” forms by other avant-gardes, like the Cubists,⁹⁷ that formally incorporated non-Western art in what was a European aesthetic, or by nineteenth-century specialists of the exotic who indulged in fleeting journeys into the bizarre from a comfortable home base in “reality”—unlike these, the Surrealists used non-Western art “in an attempt to subvert the beliefs of European bourgeois culture.”⁹⁸ Louise Tythacott notes in *Surrealism and the Exotic* that, “Instead of *aestheticizing* the primitive, they

⁹⁵ Ibid. 14.

⁹⁶ Louise Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2003).

⁹⁷ Ibid. 7.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

[the Surrealists] *Surrealized* it.”⁹⁹ “Modern surrealism and ethnography,” James Clifford observes, “began with a reality deeply in question. Others appeared now as serious human alternatives; modern cultural relativism became possible.”¹⁰⁰ Of course, “surrealizing” non-Western others has its pitfalls; besides the whiff of essentialism, it ultimately subscribes to an hierarchical evolutionary conception of the development of human societies and merely inverts the common sense value judgments attached to societies at different stages along that continuum. Michel Leiris, a surrealist at one time, later called this phenomenon “inverse racism.” We will revisit this critique later in this chapter.

Like several other Surrealists, Péret drank from the “primitivist” well. In an essay on pre-Colombian art, he writes,

The longer man remained primitive, the more his imagination retained close links with an immediate perception of the exterior world, in order to develop, later, parallel to the vivacity of that perception.... [T]he primitives of today not only show us what we were yesterday, but also what we really are beneath the cheap varnish of modern education, something that civilized man gets and will forget: that is, the fact that men of our time are very much less conscious of their nature than those men of the past.¹⁰¹

Along the same lines, in a 1943 introduction to Aztec sculpture, Péret affirms his belief in evolutionary stages, though citing the degree of development of a civilization’s art and culture as the arbiter of its level of development. By this yardstick, the Aztecs reached the same level of development as the Egyptians (surpassed by the Maya, who he compares to the Greeks).

In fact, the art of the Aztecs was on a higher plane than their habits [Péret is here referring to the practice of ritual cannibalism]. But one must admit that to judge by the present war, western civilization has not progressed much from the time of the Aztecs save in the arts of killing and lying. The gulf between the art and customs of a people still subsists, is perhaps

⁹⁹ Ibid. 60.

¹⁰⁰ James Clifford, “On Ethnographic Surrealism,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23.4 (1981): 542.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Ponge, “Benjamin Péret: Surrealista E Historiador De Palmares,” 21-2.

even deeper, for the entire Aztec people participated in artistic creation, whereas in our own day the civilized nations are often incapable of even appreciating art.¹⁰²

We can detect this surrealist attitude in the work Péret did on *candomblé* and *macumba* in 1930. As I mentioned above, he considered his examination to be made from a “poetic viewpoint”; he lingered on thick descriptions of *terreiro* (temple) rituals. The opening article in the series, in effect, explains how the diluted religious practice of *macumba* gets its name from the cannabis plant (*macumba*, *maconho*, *pango*) used in the sacred ceremonies of the more authentic *candomblé* practice.¹⁰³

The cultural preoccupations of Péret’s work on the Cane Mutiny and on Palmares are more difficult to discern. The manuscript of “*O almirante negro*” was destroyed in 1931. All we know of it comes from an essay Péret published a few years later in Nancy Cunard’s *Negro: An Anthology* (1934). Péret’s essay, “Black and White in Brazil,” refers to the naval mutiny in the last paragraphs of the piece. He gives the basic facts of the case—the reason for the rebellion, the name of the leader, the outcome of the protest, the fate of the participating sailors. Péret ends the piece by linking the 1910 mutiny to the 1919 Brazilian strikes:

In these strikes, as in the naval mutiny of 1910, the revolutionary element was not recruited, as in the previous century, from the victims of a single race, but from a class composed of a mixture of races. Whites, blacks and half-breeds were united in opposing the common enemy, rightly identified in the mind of the Brazilian proletariat with the boss. And since this latter was usually a foreigner, the lower middle-class, growing in numbers and impatient to take a more active part in state affairs, opened a campaign against foreign capitalists, denouncing them to the proletariat as the agents of Anglo-American imperialism, but omitting to mention that the national capitalism was entirely subservient to the economic systems of Europe and the U.S.A... The illiteracy of the masses favoured this undertaking, which succeeded in diverting the indignation of the masses against foreign capital and thus in safeguarding the interests of the national bourgeoisie in all its ramifications. This is the root

¹⁰² Benjamin Péret, *Los Tesoros Del Museo Nacional De México. Escultura Azteca. 20 Fotos De Manuel Alvarez Bravo, Prólogo De Benjamin Péret* (México: Museo Nacional de Historia Natural, 1943).

¹⁰³ Benjamin Péret, “Candomblé and Macumba,” *Brasil, 1920-1940: Da Antropofagia a Brasília* (São Paulo: Cosac & Naify, 2002).

of the middle-class ‘anti-imperialist’ agitation in Latin America in recent years, an agitation whose only effect can be to affirm the ascendancy of foreign capital.¹⁰⁴

There are a few things worth noting in this long quotation. First, despite the title of the manuscript (“*O almirante negro*”), Péret seems not so much interested in blackness of the mutineers as in their multiracialism (“whites, black and half-breeds”). This may suggest that, for Péret, the revolt heralds the emergence of a new agent of social transformation—the proletariat, of whatever color. Second, Péret’s implication that the “revolutionary element” prior to the turn of the twentieth century was black (“the victims of a single race”) foreshadows the argument in “Que foi o quilombo de Palmares?” that, in pre-abolition society, the slave was the agent of historical change. Finally, the question emerges whether Péret is trying to give a political explanation for his chilly reception by some Brazilian *modernistas* (e.g. Mário de Andrade and Carlos Drummond de Andrade). Could their rejection be the fruit of an “anti-imperialist” foreign backlash among the educated middle classes that ends up missing its real target? Perhaps.¹⁰⁵

Based on this snippet of information, we have good reason to think that although Péret may have approached this material *as* a surrealist, that although he may have left a surrealist stamp on the material, he did not *choose* the material *for* its surrealist qualities, and certainly not for its inherent primitivist qualities. This raises once again the question whether Péret is pursuing two sets of commitments—one fundamentally aesthetic and one political—simultaneously.

The case of the Palmares text is still more ambiguous. Titling a section of his essay “The Interest in History and in Primitive Societies, Pre-Columbian and Popular,” Ponge has tried to connect Péret’s Palmares essay directly to the “passionate interest that, since the mid-1920s, surrealism has dedicated to primitive cultures, pre-Colombian and popular cultures of the Americas.”¹⁰⁶ But, in fact, I think this is a false lead: it is difficult to discern any primitivist strains in “Que foi o quilombo de Palmares?” There is little idealization of

¹⁰⁴ Samuel Beckett and Alan Warren Friedman, Beckett in Black and Red : The Translations for Nancy Cunard's Negro (1934), Irish Literature, History, and Culture (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2000).

¹⁰⁵ Péret’s political critique of anti-imperialist sentiment replacing mass protest against national capital is echoed in Roberto Schwarz analysis of Brazilian politics in the immediate period before the 1964 coup. Like Péret, Schwarz is targeting Communist Party politics and its popular front strategies. See Roberto Schwarz and John Gledson, Misplaced Ideas : Essays on Brazilian Culture, Critical Studies in Latin American Culture (London ; New York : Verso, 1992).

¹⁰⁶ Ponge, “Benjamin Péret: Surrealista E Historiador De Palmares,” 21.

the quilombo of Palmares. Péret emphasizes, in contrast to the static portraits of Nina Rodrigues and Edison Carneiro, the dynamism of history. Palmares evolved over the decades. Its semi-democratic political organization of 1645 gave way, for specifiable reasons, to authoritarian forms of government under Zumbi in the 1690s. Its early egalitarian, communalist economic structure was replaced by a division of labor that, according to Péret, depended on slaves.¹⁰⁷ Its mainly African population was soon integrated by indigenous people, white men who had abandoned colonial armies and white women kidnapped from nearby plantations.¹⁰⁸

In a short consideration of religion in Palmares, Péret disputes the 1645 reports of the Dutch chronicler, João Blaer, who infers, based on the presence of a chapel with an image of baby Jesus and Our Lady of Mercy, that the Palmarinos were catholic; this view was reiterated in Carneiro's text. Péret rejects this conclusion, noting, "To conclude that the maroons were catholic is to forget that, even today, *macumba* and *candomblé* begin in the church, that mass constitutes the obligatory preface to the immense majority of black religious ceremonies."¹⁰⁹ Péret surmises that the religious practices in the quilombos were fundamentally syncretic—a mix of Christianity and other African-derived beliefs. In a revealing corrective to Carneiro, Péret disputes Carneiro's approving assertion that witchcraft was not permitted in Palmares, and that Palmarino religious practices must have been an "incredible mix of popular Catholicism, tinged with all the superstitions of the Middle Ages and invocations of a magic."¹¹⁰ Rather, Péret posits a small dose of popular Christianity and a substantial dose of witchcraft. He adds that while Catholicism is not without its share of vulgar witchcraft especially in that time period, "To imagine, as a consequence, that the beliefs of the maroons could position these beliefs on superior level to those just evoked [Christina beliefs in witchcraft] would be a sign of blindness."¹¹¹ In other words, Péret rejects any instinct toward inversion that might lead one to favorably assess the quilombolas beliefs in relation to similarly "backwards" catholic beliefs. This attitude would seem

¹⁰⁷ Benjamin Péret, "Que Foi O Quilombo De Palmares?," Ibid. (UFRGS) 129-30.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid. 115-19.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. 121.

¹¹⁰ Carneiro quoted in Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid. 122.

to depart from the one expressed in Péret's 1930 essay, "Candomblé and Makumba," and from the inversionist tendency of surrealist primitivism.

Péret ultimately concludes that Palmares was far from having achieved "perfect organization." "On the contrary, it [Palmares] must have remained until the end somewhat rudimentary, because, if this had not been so, its numbers should have allowed it, if not to defeat [the Portuguese], at least to have resisted for longer."¹¹² Furthermore, although material conditions may have precluded a final victory, it was subjective conditions—the level of consciousness—that Péret ultimately blames for the premature defeat. The understandable "each man for himself [*salva-se quem puder*]" individualist mentality among the slave and maroon population obviated a recognition of the *shared* collective interests—of slaves, maroons, Indians—in razing the colonial slave regime altogether.¹¹³ In Péret's words, "They [maroons] opposed the system in so far as they were its victims, but they did not mind that others continued to be subject to it.... At its best moment, the quilombo constituted an implicit appeal for the emancipation of blacks, but that appeal resulted from the opposition that appeared with slavery. It [the appeal] remained always an involuntary expression, an automatic product of the situation created by the existence of the quilombo."¹¹⁴ Still, despite the outcome, what counts for Péret is that Palmares represented "an episode in men's fight for freedom." Although its failure was inevitable, this did not "impede the quilombo from instilling in the blacks of Brazil a great hope, like the fervent anticipations of Fourier seemed for an instant to bring an ideal and immediate solution to the contradictions that were already tearing society to pieces at the beginning of the last century."¹¹⁵ The last paragraph of the text takes on a poetic quality; the final sentence reads, "Everywhere, life and death mutually give rise to each other and, beyond the pride of large trees haggard from the storm, the eyes, tomorrow, will be able to enjoy the splendor of the orchids."¹¹⁶

Löwy and Ponge make a convincing argument, recapitulated above, that the surrealist thread in "Que foi o quilombo de Palmares?" emerges from its "libertarian sensibility," from its homage to freedom, the

¹¹² Ibid. 126.

¹¹³ Ibid. 134-7.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. 134-5.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. 136.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 137.

satisfaction of which is an essential condition of human existence. What better place to begin to map an “anthropology of freedom” than with the slave’s refusal of bondage. Péret’s final lines indeed suggest that his interest in this historical episode follows from a utopian faith in the human “longing for freedom,” in this aspiration, seething in every heart.¹¹⁷ The utopian resonances of Péret’s language are unmistakable. It can be no coincidence that Péret invokes the *great hope* (hope—always referring to the future) instilled by Palmares, or “the fervent anticipations” (also forward looking) of Fourier’s ideal solutions, or that eyes that only tomorrow will enjoy the beauty of the orchid (is there any plant more certain to be well-represented in paradise?).

For Péret, the quilombo of Palmares does not represent a utopian, ideal, primitive *space* that we should look to as a model for an alternative society. Rather, Palmares represents a core—perhaps primitive—utopian yearning for freedom from the contradictions that are tearing society to pieces. This utopian aspiration is pre-linguistic; it is not the class-conscious aspiration for socialism. It is the substrate of class-consciousness; it is its motor. What Péret sees in the quilombolas is the innate (human) motor of social transformation: the utopian aspiration for freedom.

In subsequent treatments of Palmares in the arts and by the black movement, one is especially struck by a new reality of appropriation. First, the transformation of the space of Palmares, the society itself, into a utopian space had no precedent in Brazilian historiography. The focus, as we will see later, on an ideal Palmarino society—with its egalitarian economic structure, its democratic political structure, its rich cultural and religious life—was nowhere to be found in Brazilian historiography before 1956. Neither Nina Rodrigues nor Edison Carneiro can be accused of idealizing Palmares. Perhaps it could be said that Péret attached to the episode a utopian aura, but, as I have tried to show, Péret did not treat Palmares as a utopian society; the utopian impulse attached itself only to the slave’s aspiration to flee slavery, an aspiration that is memorialized in the quilombo phenomena.

¹¹⁷ Briefly, “utopia” contains a double sense that owes to the Greek homophones “eutopos” and “outopos” from which the word is derived. While the first means “good place,” the second means “no place.” Combined they suggest an ideal place that is not possible any place, which is what was intended by Sir Thomas More. Péret is here gesturing toward a Marxist, utopian tradition best exemplified by Ernst Bloch. While Marxism’s encounter with utopianism has not been uncontentious (think of Marx and Engels’ trenchant critique of utopian socialism), there have been efforts to recuperate and elaborate a utopian thread in the Marxist tradition. See footnote #127 for the senses of utopia that I am working with.

This raises the question how Palmares came to be spatialized, territorialized. My own suggestion will be that the transformation of Palmares into a discrete, bounded utopian space owes ultimately to the encounter between Palmares historiography and Brazilian modernism, an encounter that was made possible by the publication of Péret's essay in *Anhembi*. While commentators like Ponge locate *Anhembi*'s interest in Palmares in a perceived point of contact between Brazilian *modernismo* and surrealism—namely, this shared primitivist sensibility—I will argue that a primitivist reading of Palmares came not from Péret's text, but, indirectly, from the context of its publication. In effect, the utopian strains of *modernismo* attached themselves to Palmares, detecting in the famous quilombo an Afro-Brazilian analogue to the Anthropophagic Indian. As I argued above, it is not that a utopian strain is missing from Péret's text, but rather, that the utopian aspiration to which Péret pays homage belongs to the slave qua slave not to the black man qua black man. While Péret's utopian impulse for freedom is universal, the Afro-Brazilian utopian space is particular. In the hands of the *modernistas*, the resonances of Palmares were transformed.

IX

Brazilian *modernismo* is universally acknowledged to have been inaugurated in February 1922 with celebration of the “Week of Modern Art” in São Paulo. Its ethos would be captured in Oswald de Andrade’s metaphor of anthropophagy, or man-eating. Oswald de Andrade intended to apply the metaphor of cannibalism to a new, Brazilian national aesthetic that eschewed, on the one hand, a tradition of imitation of European forms, and on the other hand, a romanticist appropriation of the “noble savage.”¹¹⁸ The metaphor embraced the imputed cannibalism of indigenous people, transforming its negative charge in the discourse of the scandalized colonizer into a positive virtue. Just as Brazil’s indigenous man-eaters consumed the flesh of their enemies in order to absorb their strength and increase their own powers, so too would the Brazilian *modernistas* swallow foreign culture to fortify themselves against those enemies. Randal Johnson notes, “[C]annibalism becomes the underlying force of all social relationships. It is the new paradigm that expresses, in allegorical terms, the revolt of the colonized against the colonizer.”¹¹⁹ Oswald de Andrade declared in his famous “Cannibalist Manifesto,” published in the first “dentification” of the *Revista de Antropofagia*, “Tupi or not Tupi, that is the question.” Playing on Hamlet’s question “To be or not to be?” Andrade introduces the idea that the fundamental, almost “ontological,” question for the Brazilian intelligentsia is whether to embrace Brazil’s indigenous character and past. “Tupi” is the popular, generic name for the native peoples of Brazil,¹²⁰ presumably coined for the particular people, Tupinambá, who were one of Brazil’s largest indigenous ethnic groups at the time of the Portuguese colonization. In effect, Andrade playfully asks “to be Indian or not to be Indian?” The manifesto’s answer is, of course, “Yes, let us be Tupi.”

¹¹⁸ Randal Johnson has argued that the immediate impetus for Oswald de Andrade’s “Cannibalist Manifesto” was the work of the *Verde-Amarelo* movement and the *Anta* group, two modernist groupings of conservative intellectuals also interested in the figure of the Indian and committed to revising the romanticist myth of the “noble savage” memorialized in the nineteenth century romances of José de Alencar and others. Unlike the Anthropophagists though, Verde-Amarelo/Anta were after a harmonious integration of the Indian along the lines articulated by José Vasconcelos in *The Cosmic Race*; the Indian would be incorporated, whitened, in a sense. Oswald de Andrade’s conception was the reverse: it would be the Indian that cannibalized the other. Despite this, one of Verde-Amarelo complaints about Andrade was his flaccid nationalism and his deference to the European avant-garde. For more on this conflict, see Randal Johnson, “Tupi or Not Tupi: Cannibalism and Nationalism in Contemporary Brazilian Literature and Culture,” *Modern Latin American Fiction: A Survey*, ed. John King (London: faber and faber, 1987).

¹¹⁹ Ibid. 50.

¹²⁰ This is point is made in Leslie Bary’s translation and annotation of the manifesto. See Oswald de Andrade and translated by Leslie Bary, “Oswald De Andrade’s “Cannibalist Manifesto,”” *Latin American Literary Review* 19.38 (1991).

Andrade's use of the first person plural signals the adoption of this (projected) indigenous perspective: "It was because we never had grammars, nor collections of old plants. And we never knew what urban, suburban, frontier and continental were. Lazy in the *mapamundi* of Brazil./ A participatory consciousness, a religious rhythmic.// Down with all the importers of canned consciousness. The palpable existence of life. And the pre-logical mentality for Mr. Lévy-Bruhl to study."¹²¹ A dialogue with primitivism permeates these lines. The indigenous "we" is without "grammatical discipline" or classification-manias or cities or guarded territorial borders. But these deficiencies gain an ironic resonance in the next line with the positive evocation of the "lazy Indian." The "lazy Indian" line—perhaps because it is combined with a spatial reference to the contradictory image of a world map of Brazil ("*mapamundi* of Brazil")—conjures the "lazy" Adam and Eve before they were expelled from the Garden of Eden. We may be inclined to refer to that time as a time when "laziness" testified to virtue, and when the map of the world was the map of Paradise. Is the Indian the man without sin, and Brazil Paradise? This line marks a positive turn as the "lazy Indian" can then boast of an uncanned, participatory consciousness,¹²² of a "religious rhythmic," of a discernible ebullience toward life. Even the reference to his "pre-logical mentality" has an ambiguous significance; on the one hand, it fits the primitivist valorization of "irrationality," magic, existential ebullience, "religious rhythmic"; on the other, it implies a dig at ethnology ("for Lévy-Bruhl to study"). Lévy-Bruhl (1857-1939) was a French philosopher who wrote extensively on the differences between the "mentalities" of "civilized" and "primitive" peoples. While the "civilized mentality" exhibits a certain kind of logic, the "primitive mentality" is radically different, though internally consistent. It is pre-logical, which is not to say that it is illogical: its logic is "mystical, spiritual and supernatural."¹²³ This short extract from Andrade's "Cannibalist Manifesto" reveals two important themes in Anthropophagism—the valorization of an essentialized "primitive" *weltanschauung* and utopia—coming together as one. Oswald de Andrade, in Randal Johnson's words, "calls for a utopian return to a pre-Cabralian Golden Age of matriarchal society when man,

¹²¹ Ibid.: 39.

¹²² "Participatory consciousness" is a concept from Lucien Lévy-Bruhl that refers basically to mystical thinking supposedly characteristic of non-Western peoples. This is noted by Leslie Bary in his notes to Andrade's Cannibalist Manifesto.

¹²³ Tythacott, *Surrealism and the Exotic* 56. Tythacott notes that the Surrealists were certainly attracted by Lévy-Bruhl's work, though some, including Breton, eventually rejected it because it seemed to offer no hope for a fusing of the two "mentalities."

rather than enslave his enemies, ate them. It was a society based on natural communism, where a just distribution of material and spiritual goods was practiced.... Reversing traditional interpretations, the New World thus becomes the source of all revolutions and all theories of primitivism, the Caraíba [Caribe] revolution the synthesis, the beginning and the end, of all Western revolutions. It will transcend capitalism, fascism, and communism, returning mankind to a state of primitive yet bountiful innocence.”¹²⁴ The link in the Andrade manifesto between a bounded space (Brazil) and a Golden Age in the past (a time before Cabral) to a pre-logical people (the Tupi) to a happy way of life (communal, matriarchal, egalitarian—“Before the Portuguese discovered Brazil, Brazil had discovered happiness”) reveals a utopian vision par excellence.

The spatial and nostalgic character of the primitivist utopia is as remarkable as it is unmistakable. For, this is not the only utopian thread in the manifesto or in Brazilian modernism. The other utopian strain is forward-looking and follows from what is at bottom an embrace of mixture, not purity. Sergio Luiz Prado Bellei asserts that that “The new utopia,” imagined by Andrade, “would be achieved by not simply returning to primitivism, but by fusing European technology and primitivism.”¹²⁵ According to David Brookshaw, in a more racially oriented reading, “the most significant contribution of the ‘primitivist’ phase of the 1920s was ultimately to see Brazil’s cultural potential and originality as lying neither in Amerindian nor in Afro-Brazilian tradition, but in a combination of both, together with that of the Portuguese. Even if Brazil was to become racially whiter, the cultural foundation of the country would nevertheless be established on the heritage of three races, the outcome of which would be a new syncretic Brazilian culture.”¹²⁶ These two utopian strains will emerge in the future appropriations of the quilombo.¹²⁷

¹²⁴ Johnson, “Tupi or Not Tupi: Cannibalism and Nationalism in Contemporary Brazilian Literature and Culture,” 51; 53.

¹²⁵ Sérgio Luiz Prado Bellei, “Brazilian Anthropophagy Revisited,” *Cannibalism and the Colonial World*, eds. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Iverson (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 94.

¹²⁶ David Brookshaw, *Race and Color in Brazilian Literature* (Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press, 1986) 93.

¹²⁷ For a helpful introduction to the varieties of understandings of utopia, see Ruth Levitas, “Introduction: The Elusive Idea of Utopia,” *History of the Human Sciences* 16.1 (2003). Levitas identifies two main threads. The first is a broader notion of utopia as “utopian impulse,” basically, a human “expression of desire for a better way of living” (4). This thread may be traced back to Ernst Bloch’s *The Spirit of Utopia* and *The Principle of Hope*. The inheritors of this existential strain of the concept include Ruth Levitas herself, Karl Mannheim, and Fredric Jameson. The other thread is more circumscribed and has the advantage of delimiting a category that can get away from one. Krishan Kumar, for example, prefers to think of utopia as a particular literary genre in the tradition of Sir Thomas More’s *Utopia*. One clear distinction between these threads is that while the former is abstract, the later is often concrete and territorialized (or “spatialized” in my text). This basic distinction that Levitas observes is the one that underpins my analysis. For more on conceptions of utopia, see Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (New York: P. Allan, 1990); Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2000); Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, Studies in Contemporary German Social

If the figure of the Indian was central to Brazilian *modernismo*, the same was not true of the Afro-Brazilian. David Brookshaw notes that, notwithstanding Brazil's sizeable black population, "The primitivists [he is referring to the *modernistas*] of the 1920s were... to resort rather more to the Indian than to the Negro."¹²⁸ Besides the work of a few Northeastern writers like Jorge de Lima, Ascenso Ferreira, and Jorge Amado, few early Southern *modernistas* engaged with black themes or created black characters.¹²⁹ Brookshaw explains this neglect as owing to "the greater tradition of Indianism in Brazilian literary nationalism [e.g. *Iracema*, *O'Guarani*], a tradition itself determined by the very remoteness of the Indian and his isolation from the effects of colonial history."¹³⁰ We may add that the Afro-Brazilian experience in Brazil did not obviously fit the contours of Andrade's utopian vision. While the pre-logical attribution may have fit (and was subsequently often employed), the real problem had to do with space. Before the arrival of the Portuguese, the native population of Brazil lived in innocent, ideal, bounded communities across Brazil. Before the arrival of the Portuguese in Brazil, the native population of Africa lived in innocent, ideal, bounded communities across Africa. After Cabral, black Africans were brought to Brazil as slaves to work in plantations, living side by side with their white masters. These Africans were transformed by their new circumstances: they lost the charming patina of the irrational, mystical native when they came into contact with modernity—i.e. when they became slaves. Their native charm had depended on their distance, on the impermeability of the territorial borders of their communities. In a nationalist ideology like Anthropophagia, there was no room for pre-logical "primitives" from Africa. Brazil, according to this logic, had never had pre-logical black natives; it had only had pre-logical black slaves. This explains why the quilombo, and only the quilombo, could provide the long sought Afro-Brazilian analogue to the Tupi *mapamundi* of Brazil. The quilombo—understood as a bounded, discrete, and utopian space—represents, in a sense, the "indianization" of Brazilian blackness. It is the spatialization, the territorialization, of the maroon phenomenon that would achieve this end. But

Thought, 1st American ed., 3 vols. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1986); Karl Mannheim, Louis Wirth and Edward Albert Shils, *Ideology and Utopia; an Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1936); Krishan Kumar, *Utopianism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991); Fredric Jameson, *Archaeologies of the Future : The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions* (New York: Verso, 2005); Susan Buck-Morss, *Dreamworld and Catastrophe : The Passing of Mass Utopia in East and West* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000).

¹²⁸ Brookshaw, *Race and Color in Brazilian Literature* 88.

¹²⁹ Ibid. 88-90.

¹³⁰ Ibid. 88.

spatialization was not inevitable. We have seen that at the time that Péret published “Que foi o quilombo de Palmares?” in 1956, the spatialization of the quilombo had not yet taken place. My contention is that publication of Péret’s essay in *Anhembi*, a modernist cultural magazine with a modernist readership, was a crucial step in this process. The story of Palmares, from a certain point of view, offered a perfect solution to the *modernista* neglect of Afro-Brazil.

X

It was undoubtedly the Marxist approach to the history of Palmares that would inspire the film and theater treatments of the 1960s.¹³¹ Palmares was first memorialized on film by Carlos Diegues in the 1963 Cinema Novo classic, *Ganga Zumba*. *Ganga Zumba* is one of only four films referred to by name in Glauber Rocha’s 1965 manifesto, “An Esthetic of Hunger.”¹³² And this was Carlos Diegues’ first feature film.

Twenty years after *Ganga Zumba*’s release, Diegues revisited the theme of Palmares in his 1984 film, *Quilombo*. *Quilombo* was made under the auspices of Embrafilme, the state film corporation with the financial assistance of the French company Gaumont, during the “abertura” or liberalization that preceded the restoration of democracy in Brazil in 1985.¹³³ When asked why he had returned to the theme of Palmares, Diegues blithely responded that he did not have the budget needed to make the film he had wanted to make at the time of *Ganga Zumba*.¹³⁴ But that was not the whole story. In the years that separated Diegues’ two films, the story of Palmares had moved to the center of Brazilian racial politics. Zumbi, the last king of Palmares, had been adopted by the black movement of the late 1970’s as a potent symbol of the struggle against racial inequality in Brazil and was in the process of being nationalized. And this new significance of Palmares and Zumbi was reflected in Diegues’ second film.

¹³¹ See Augusto Boal’s 1965 musical *Arena Conta Zumbi* and Roberto Schwarz’s treatment of it in *Misplaced Ideas: Essays on Brazilian Culture*. London, Verso, 1992.

¹³² Glauber Rocha, “An Esthetic of Hunger,” *New Latin American Cinema, Volume One: Theory, Practices and Transcontinental Articulations*, ed. Michael Martin, vol. one (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997).

¹³³ Randal Johnson, *The Film Industry in Brazil: Culture and the State* (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987).

¹³⁴ Coco Fusco, “Choosing between Legend and History: An Interview with Carlos Diegues,” *Cineaste* 15.1 (1986).

Diegues' *Ganga Zumba* was based on a 1962 romance novel of the same name, written by João Felício dos Santos and dedicated to the Marxist historian, Édison Carneiro.¹³⁵ Still, his authorial preamble to the novel is reminiscent of Péret's "libertarian sensibility": "Palmares was a magnificent exception, sublime fruit of the thirst for freedom that...attacked the most noble blacks subject to the contingencies of captivity."¹³⁶ The preamble ends with this promise: "This book belongs to all those that, at one time in their lives, fought to the death for a star, whatever star."¹³⁷ While dos Santos's book is titled *Ganga Zumba*, after the first Palmares leader who escaped slavery to become "king," it recounts the history of Palmares through the death of Zumbi, who broke with Ganga Zumba over his decision to sign a treaty with the Portuguese. Zumbi, not Ganga Zumba, is the heroic figure memorialized in the contemporary public sphere; Ganga Zumba is generally remembered as having made a foolish and cowardly, though perhaps understandable, compromise with the Portuguese authorities, which eventually betrayed him. Why would dos Santos privilege Ganga Zumba in his romance? Perhaps because Ganga Zumba was symbolically the first fugitive; in some sense, he, more than Zumbi, embodies the thirst for freedom within captivity. Zumbi, who fought to the death against re-enslavement, embodies the love of a known, lived freedom—a freedom of the status quo. The perspective of the first fugitive is forward-looking and revolutionary; the perspective of the last fugitive is preservationist. Both Péret and Carneiro were interested in the impetus to flee. Another explanation sees in Ganga Zumba's story a kind of rags-to-riches narrative. Unlike Zumbi, Ganga Zumba had spent considerable time as a slave on a plantation only to then become leader of the most significant quilombo in Latin American history. Support for this explanation may be found in the romance's epigraph, which quotes from a mid-nineteenth century historical journal, "they [the Palmarinos] are all obedient to one who calls himself Ganga-Zumba, which means Great Master; this one they treat as King and Master all those born in Palmares; he has a palace... he is assisted by guards and officials, that Regal Houses are accustomed to having; he is treated with all the respect of a King and with all the ceremony of a Master; those arriving in his presence, put one knee

¹³⁵ João Felício dos Santos, *Ganga-Zumba: [Romance]* ([Rio de Janeiro,: Edições de Ouro, 1967).

¹³⁶ João Felício dos Santos, *Ganga-Zumba: [Romance]*, Coleção Vera Cruz, (Rio de Janeiro,: Editora Civilização Brasileira, 1962) 3. (translation mine)

¹³⁷ Ibid. 4. (translation mine)

on the ground and clap their hands... affirming his excellence.”¹³⁸ These lines conjure a magisterial figure that conspicuously inverts the stark image of the debased slave.

Diegues’ filmic adaptation of *Ganga Zumba* opens on the young ‘play-boy’ Antão (Antonio Pitanga), living on a sugar plantation. Antão is the grandson of Zambi, king of Palmares, around the time of the Dutch occupation of Northeastern Brazil (1630-1654). Aged and ready for retirement, Zambi has sent messengers to gather up his enslaved grandson from the nearby *engenho* (sugar mill) to succeed him. *Ganga Zumba* depicts Antão’s coming-to-consciousness, his decision to escape to Palmares, and the treacherous journey there followed closely by slave catchers. The film is structured as a double journey: as a literal journey from plantation to quilombo, and as a journey of consciousness for the protagonist who goes from being the ‘play-boy’ Antão to being Ganga Zumba, leader of Palmares. Unlike the João Felício dos Santos romance, Diegues’ film earns its title. It ends before Ganga Zumba has even stepped foot in Palmares; it is an account of his achievement of a class-consciousness adequate to his new role.

There are a few striking features of this film, all of which are exemplified in the film’s ending. Antão and the handful of survivors of his journey from the plantation to Palmares are ambushed by slave catchers. Palmares warriors suddenly emerge from the woods to defend them. The warriors kill the entire contingent of slave catchers except one, the slave catcher’s slave assistant. Desperate to save his own life, the man yells out, “I am a slave,” “I am black.” Over and over again, the lines are repeated while the camera is focused in a close-up on Antão’s face. Boiling with rage, Antão leaps at the man, decapitating him in one stroke, before the screen goes black.

This sequence suggests that the central conflict of the film is between those that believe in the idea of Palmares (i.e. a radically different configuration of society) and those that are against it. Because the film presents this political-ideological conflict as ultimately a conflict of irreconcilable interests, it adapts Benjamin Péret’s argument that Palmares represented a class conflict between masters and slaves. The fact that the slave catcher’s slave is himself a black slave cannot redeem him. His blackness has not guaranteed his solidarity, and therefore the conflict is not racial. The fact that he is a slave cannot redeem him either because the film

¹³⁸ Ibid. (translation mine)

depicts him as a traitor to his class. The slave catcher's slave is at best like the mid-level manager of the factory who is in some sense a worker, but who, because he does not represent worker's interests, is the boss's instrument.

In the film's epilogue, at the very site of the battle with the slave catchers, Antão is "crowned" Ganga Zumba, king of Palmares, by a contingent sent from Palmares to protect the future leader. The film's final shot is an aerial shot that lasts almost two minutes. It depicts the procession—Antão, the survivors of the battle with the slave catcher, and the dead—making its way along a meandering road leading presumably to the utopia of Palmares; the camera lingers for several seconds on the empty road before the film finally ends on that static image (figure 1). A prominent feature of this ending is that Palmares is never depicted. Palmares functions in the film as a placeholder for the alternative society of the future. The utopia is never given form; it remains only a utopian aspiration. When the various characters in the film summon it—when they seem to hear its distant drums—the film makes clear, through focalization, that these are moments of mental subjectivity: the drums of Palmares that are audible on the audio track beat in their ears alone.



Figure 1. The Road to Palmares. *Ganga Zumba* (Diegues, 1963)

Palmares had not been treated as a utopian society in the work of Carneiro or Péret. The latter had spent considerable space discussing the use of slavery in Palmares—the ways in which the black state was hobbled by its proximity to the slave system and the way in which Palmarino consciousness did not constitute a mature class consciousness.¹³⁹ But Péret had also gestured at the utopian kernel in the story of Palmares: quilombo as signifying utopian aspiration more than utopian realization. Diegues' *Ganga Zumba* duplicated this sense of Palmares as a placeholder for the utopian impulse. In *Ganga Zumba*, Palmares represents the utopian aspiration for a radically different future, as it must have for the slaves who fled there in the seventeenth century. In some sense it was the subjective dimension—the oppressed's wish for a new society—that Diegues is memorializing. We may wonder what it means to so scrupulously avoid giving utopia a form. Here it is helpful to recall what Fredric Jameson has said about the authenticity of the utopia: "that utopia is somehow negative; and that it is most authentic when we cannot imagine it. Its function lies not in helping us to imagine a better future but rather in demonstrating our utter incapacity to imagine such a future—our imprisonment in a non-utopian present without historicity or futurity..."¹⁴⁰ Indeed, in *Ganga Zumba*, Diegues cannot, or declines to, imagine utopia, to adumbrate its perfections—which is not to say that he declines the seduction of the utopian impulse. For, like João Felício dos Santos and Péret, he links that aspiration to the desire for freedom from oppression.

But what oppression did Diegues have in mind? He made *Ganga Zumba* in the context of a utopian cinema movement and as a way of allegorizing his own present. In 1963, Brazil might have looked like it was teetering on revolution. The populist government of João Goulart had been sympathetic to the anti-imperialist left, which had been recently growing in strength and whose arguments were beginning to permeate the public sphere. Roberto Schwarz vividly characterizes the period,

These were times of splendid irreverence. In Rio de Janeiro the CPSs (Centres for Popular Culture) would improvise political theatre at factory gates and in trades and student union meetings; and in slums they were beginning to make films and records. The pre-

¹³⁹ Péret, Ponge and Maestri Filho, *O Quilombo Dos Palmares*.

¹⁴⁰ Fredric Jameson, "The Politics of Utopia," *New Left Review* 25, Jan-Feb. (2004): 46.

revolutionary winds were decompartmentalizing the national consciousness and filling the newspapers with talk of agrarian reform, rural disturbances, the workers' movement, the nationalization of American firms, etc. The nation had become unrecognizably intelligent. Political journalism, hand in hand with satirical humour, was making great strides in the big cities. There were even a number of parliamentary deputies who made some interesting speeches. In short, intellectual production was beginning to reorient its relationship with the masses.¹⁴¹

The Cinema Novo filmmakers were participating in this sea change, especially with their favored “conversion plots,” to borrow Schwarz’s coinage.¹⁴² Films like *Os fuzis* (*The Guns*), *Vidas secas* (*Barren Lives*), *Deus e o diabo na terra de sol* (*Black God, White Devil*)—all films mentioned in Rocha’s manifesto—followed the political conversions of characters from political complacency to political militancy. *Ganga Zumba* is no exception. Schwarz suggests that these “conversion plots” harmonized with the mood of the period; they reflected not the idealist detachment of their authors, but the rapt attention of the masses inching toward revolution. *Ganga Zumba*’s protagonist, Antão, addresses the camera directly as he calls out “Something has to be done. If it were easy, we wouldn’t be here. We must go on fighting and fighting all the time. Fight!” (figure 2). This is an invitation for spectatorial participation in the events that seemed for a moment imminent.

¹⁴¹ Schwarz and Gledson, *Misplaced Ideas : Essays on Brazilian Culture* 135.

¹⁴² Ibid. 159.



Figure 2. Antão's Call to Action. *Ganga Zumba* (Diegues, 1963)

This contextualization of the film as one produced in the midst of leftist upsurges hints at another layer of the film. The story of Palmares may have provided an easily assimilable lesson for Diegues' historical present, functioning as a kind of allegory.¹⁴³ Antão was involved in a class struggle, on the other side of the conflict—imagined as a dusty, winding, uphill road—was an unknown paradise of freedom, Palmares. If Palmares symbolized Brazil's first “authentic class conflict,” Brazil's 1962-3 context is imagined as its last.

It was Péret's essay that had first employed such powerful analogies. In the last paragraphs of “Que foi o quilombo de Palmares?” he compares the “great hope” that Palmares instilled in Afro-Brazilians to the “fervent anticipations” kindled by Fourier's grand designs. Moreover, in these last lines of the essay Péret inserts a seemingly anomalous reference to the necessity of committing errors “before discovering in the depths of every person the element of truth that it was possible to realize and whose recognition conditions the success of the leap that will follow.” “Truth and error seem, that is, to exalt one another; they cannot subsist in isolation.” They are in an “eternal embrace.” “Doesn't the struggle without respite that, sometimes,

¹⁴³ Stam echoes this view. See Stam, *Tropical Multiculturalism: A Comparative History of Race in Brazilian Cinema and Culture*.

interrupts that embrace also produce its warmth?"¹⁴⁴ Here Péret is offering consolation for the failure of Palmares. But the consolation has taken on the form of a general law: mistakes, errors, are learned from and overcome. Of course, the particular Palmarino error that Péret has just spent pages elaborating is the failure of Palmarino class-consciousness. In these last pages, Péret has been making veiled reference to his present context. This teleological account of the dialectic of truth and error that ends with the utopian evocation of "tomorrow," when our eyes "can enjoy the splendor of the orchids," evinces presentist preoccupations and a forward-looking gaze.¹⁴⁵

XI

On May Day 1965, a few years after *Ganga Zumba's* completion, the leftist Artistic Director of the Teatro Arena of São Paulo, Augusto Boal, staged a new musical titled, *Arena conta Zumbi* (co-written with Gianfrancesco Guarnieri, Paulo José, and musicians Edu Lobo and Vinicius de Moraes).¹⁴⁶ Like Diegues' *Ganga Zumba*, it was based on the romance by João Felício dos Santos.¹⁴⁷ Boal also did significant historical research.¹⁴⁸ And like Diegues' film, Boal's piece also allegorized the story of Palmares, tailoring it to Brazil's new political context. The 1965 Brazilian political scene was dramatically transformed. A coup in 1964 had replaced Goulart with a right-wing military government spouting nationalist rhetoric while beholden to international capital. The repression that followed the coup targeted the links between radicalizing students and intellectuals and the working classes, terrorizing the latter but allowing the cultural left, cut off from the masses, to flourish. Roberto Schwarz comments on the anomaly of Brazil's most exceptional period of cultural production: "Despite the existence of a right-wing dictatorship, the cultural hegemony of the left is

¹⁴⁴ Péret, "Que Foi O Quilombo De Palmares?," 136-7. All translations of Péret's text are mine.

¹⁴⁵ This is not the only instance of Péret's allegorical appropriation of the past. The Cane Mutiny discussed above had provided Péret a similarly combination of truth and error. The sailors had joined on a class basis—overcoming racial division—but ultimately defeated by the substitution of a foreign enemy for a national one. See Beckett and Friedman, *Beckett in Black and Red : The Translations for Nancy Cunard's Negro (1934)*.

¹⁴⁶ Margo Milleret, "Acting into Action: Teatro Arena's *Zumbi*," *Latin American Theatre Review* 21.1 (1987).

¹⁴⁷ Robert Anderson, "The Muses of Chaos and Destruction of *Arena Conta Zumbi*," *Ibid.* 29.2 (1996).

¹⁴⁸ Margo Milleret, "Acting into Action: Teatro Arena's *Zumbi*," *Ibid.* 21.1 (1987); Ana Elena Puga, *Memory, Allegory, and Testimony in South American Theater : Upstaging Dictatorship*, Routledge Advances in Theatre and Performance Studies (New York: Routledge, 2008).

virtually complete.”¹⁴⁹ After all, those who were really in control were a pro-American, modern, cosmopolitan bourgeoisie, which was every bit as attuned to international criteria of taste as their left-wing counterparts.¹⁵⁰ Schwarz has argued that so long as the “cultural avant-garde of the West” at the time had “only one topic, the social rottenness of capitalism,” the military could hardly bring “their ideological endeavours into the public domain.... In this vacuum, it was natural that the market together with the authority of the experts, would win out.... Cultural life got moving again, with the same people as before [the coup], in a different national situation.”¹⁵¹

Augusto Boal was one of those people. In the immediate post-coup period, the Arena Theatre turned to staging pieces about national subjects. *Arena conta Zumbi* was one of the most popular of these productions, eventually traveling, in the late 60s and early 70s to Mexico, Argentina, Peru, the United States, and France.¹⁵² In Brazil, the musical was performed mainly before homogenous, politicized student audiences still reeling from the defeat of the left. In this performance and political context, *Arena conta Zumbi*'s allegorical message was unmistakable; it was a veiled way of talking about the present. The Portuguese colonial forces stood for the dictatorship; Zumbi (returned to prominence in this version) for the Brazilian people.¹⁵³ Still, the lesson of this didactic musical was similar to Diegues' and to Péret's: the fight for freedom must continue—it has yet to be won. The musical ends with Ganga Zumba declaring, “The voice of my people was raised. Because we wanted freedom. And my voice with theirs. My voice isn't much, but it can shout and I shouted. I'm sure that the owners of that land would have been much happier had they not heard my voice...That's how I passed the time that was given to me to live. Because I wanted freedom.” The chorus replies, “Because we wanted freedom!” “He understood that in the end to fight/ is a way of believing/ is a way of having/ a reason for being./ The whip struck, the whip/ struck so many times that the people soon tired of it.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁴⁹ Schwarz and Gledson, *Misplaced Ideas : Essays on Brazilian Culture* 127.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid. 138.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Milleret, "Acting into Action: Teatro Arena's *Zumbi*."

¹⁵³ See Robert Anderson, "The Muses of Chaos and Destruction of *Arena Conta Zumbi*," Ibid.29.2 (1996); Milleret, "Acting into Action: Teatro Arena's *Zumbi*."; Schwarz and Gledson, *Misplaced Ideas : Essays on Brazilian Culture*; David George, "Theatre of the Oppressed and Teatro De Arena: In and out of Context," *Latin American Theatre Review* 28.2 (1995).

¹⁵⁴ Augusto Boal, Gianfrancesco Guarnieri and Edu Lobo, "Arena Conta Zumbi," *Revista de Teatro* 378 (1970): 54. (translation mine)

In the most trenchant, yet solidaristic, critique of the musical so far written, Schwarz cites two faults, one owing to Arena's method in this period, the other owing to the piece itself. Because Arena played before an usually politically homogenous, sympathetic, basically bourgeois audience, it manifested the very anomaly that characterized the period as a whole. The forced break with the masses manifested in the class composition of the audience underlined that a thoroughly democratic, revolutionary practice had become merely a "symbol of revolution."¹⁵⁵ The work of education, the construction of solidarity, that may have taken place within a more socially and economically heterogeneous crowd became an exercise in self-congratulation. But for what? The applause and enthusiasm of the audience, which shared the same political vistas as the directors and actors, seemed somehow hollow and inappropriately uncritical. After all, "If the people are intelligent and courageous, why were they defeated?"¹⁵⁶ Of course, this is a problem of political art, which should not, as far as Schwarz is concerned, succumb to moralistic self-congratulatory indulgence, especially in the face of actual defeat.

Arena conta Zumbi suffered from this problem and from its corollary. According to Schwarz, although the Zumbi conceit allowed the musical to avoid censorship by "[combining] an opposition which today is merely moral—the slave question—to a political one [the dictatorship], and, on behalf of the latter, [capitalize] on the relaxed enthusiasm which the former attracts,"¹⁵⁷ it ultimately suffered because the analogy between the past and present was not pursued consistently. The historical episode was treated as *both* an "artifice," a veiled way of talking about the present, and as the "origin" of the present struggle (i.e. "the struggle between slaves and Portuguese masters is, *already*, the struggle between the people and imperialism").¹⁵⁸ As a result, Schwarz argues, "historical distinctions—which had no importance if the slave was an artifice, but do have it now, if he is an origin—are blurred, and the inevitable banality of the

¹⁵⁵ Schwarz and Gledson, *Misplaced Ideas : Essays on Brazilian Culture* 145.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. 146.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid. 149.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

commonplace takes over: the rights of the oppressed, the cruelty of the oppressors; after 1964, just as in Zumbi's time (the seventeenth century), people are still searching for liberty."¹⁵⁹

Perhaps Péret and Diegues' presentist impulses may be similarly critiqued. One mitigating factor, at least in the case of Péret, is that for him "historical distinctions" do matter. History is dynamic and teleological, not cyclical; it moves inexorably toward truth. For Péret, there is a lesson to be learned from the errors of the Palmarinos. Boal's scheme does not admit the dialectic of truth and error. In fact, this is at bottom Schwarz's complaint: the past may offer inspiration, but even more so it offers errors ripe for analysis. Where is Boal's analysis of those errors?

Despite the weaknesses of the musical, it is significant for my argument that Boal—like Diegues, Péret, Carneiro—emphasizes struggle, conflict, and the desire for freedom animating it. In the work of Péret, Diegues, and Boal—though not Carneiro—we may also detect, to different extents, a national application of the historical episode of Palmares, an effort to bring Palmares from the periphery of Brazilian history to the core of a revised leftist Brazilian history. The extent to which this move inadvertently marginalized Afro-Brazilians is a point of contention. Does this proto-nationalization jeopardize Afro-Brazilian historical specificity? From a certain point of view, these class-conscious works under discussion, by making slavery central to their underlying presentist concerns, end up making the essential prerequisite for enslavement—blackness—central as well. On the other hand, they refuse a discrete, segregated history for Afro-Brazilians. While these works gesture at the existence of a discrete Afro-Brazilian cultural identity through references to Afro-Brazilian religion in *Ganga Zumba* (which incorporates terminology from João Felício dos Santos' glossary of African-derived words) and "Que foi o quilombo dos Palmares?" and the carnival act frame of *Arena conta Zumbi*—still, it is not their main preoccupation. Moreover, at this point, the quilombo of Palmares had not yet been spatialized, transformed into a utopian territory of the past.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

XII

By the time Diegues revisited the subject of Palmares, in the 1984 film, *Quilombo*, this change had indeed taken place. Part sequel, part remake, *Quilombo* picks up around 1650 with Ganga Zumba's life on the plantation, and his subsequent escape to Palmares. In this version, Ganga Zumba (Tony Tornado) is not a playboy; he is older, more mature, already a leader. He does not need to arrive at consciousness like the protagonists of the Cinema Novo films; he already has consciousness. Most of *Quilombo* chronicles the rise of Palmares, the failed treaty with the governor of Recife, the death of Ganga Zumba, his replacement by Zumbi (Antonio Pompeu), and the fall of Palmares at the hands of the Portuguese mercenary, Domingos Jorge Velho (Maurício do Valle).

The most significant difference between *Ganga Zumba* and *Quilombo* is that in the later film Diegues represents Palmares. Palmares is no longer a utopian aspiration—a happy, future, nowhere. It has been spatialized; it has form, shape, and sound: the form, shape and sound of carnival (figure 3). We are treated to a vibrant and exotic mise-en-scene—elaborate costumes, body paint, thatch huts, an abundance of ceramic pots, sculpturally piled—dancing, and a score by Gilberto Gil and Walid Salomão. The modernist aesthetic of *Ganga Zumba* has given way to a carnival aesthetic in *Quilombo*. Robert Stam and Ismail Xavier have described it as the “equivalent of a sambaenredo, that is, as analogous to the ensemble of songs, dances, costumes, and lyrics that form part of samba school pageantry.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁶⁰ Robert Stam and Ismail Xavier, "Transformation of National Allegory: Brazilian Cinema from Dictatorship to Democratization," *New Latin American Cinema, Volume 2: Theory, Practices, and Transcontinental Articulations*, ed. Michael Martin (Detroit: Wayne State, 1997) 313.



Figure 3. A Spatialized Palmares. *Quilombo* (Diegues, 1984).
The contrast with figure 1 could not be more stark—Palmares as site versus Palmares as road.

Quilombo's carnivalesque aesthetic has a lot in common with Tropicalism (also called 'cannibalist-tropicalist'), the third phase of the Cinema Novo movement that began in 1968 after the release of *Terra em transe* [*Land in Anguish*] (1967) and is best exemplified by the 1969 film adaptation of Mário de Andrade's 1928 modernista classic, *Macunaíma*. In *Macunaíma*, the protagonist of the same name, "the hero of his people" (according to the narration), played by the Afro-Brazilian actor, Grande Otelo, is born in "the depths of the virgin-forest" to an old white woman (obviously in drag). Macunaíma is born fully grown, an adult man of about 50 years old. His family—a mix of whites, indigenous, and Afro-Brazilians—respond to the birth with horror: "How ugly! He stinks!"¹⁶¹ Tropicalist films combined archaic themes with the most up-to-date

¹⁶¹ Stam, *Tropical Multiculturalism : A Comparative History of Race in Brazilian Cinema and Culture* 239-40.

aesthetic forms and techniques: “The stock of images and emotions belonging to the patriarchal country, rural and urban, is exposed to the most advanced or fashionable forms and techniques in the world—electronic music, Eisensteinian montage, the colours and the montage of pop art, the prose of *Finnegans Wake*.”¹⁶² Anachronism was elevated to an aesthetic principle. Combined and uneven development were its topical substrate, and allegory its mode of signification. The result was grotesque, absurdist representations, which, according to its defenders, represented the total farce of modernization schemes from above. For Roberto Schwarz, the ideological commitments of tropicalist works were more ambiguous. On the one hand, the “absolute value of what is new, allows the historical distance between theme and technique given definition in the typical tropicalist image, just as it may express an attack on reaction, to express also the triumph of the city-dwelling grandchildren over their provincial grandparents—the undeniable achievement of having been born later and of reading foreign magazines.”¹⁶³ On the other hand, “the combination of violent social criticism and bare-faced commercialism...can also, when they cast an ironic light on its doubtful side, capture the hardest and most difficult contradictions of present intellectual production.”¹⁶⁴

Tropicalism also returned to the cannibalist formulas conceived by Oswald de Andrade and the Anthropophagist movement. In a written introduction to *Macunaíma*, the director of the film version, Joaquim Pedro de Andrade, adumbrated the terms of this return:

Cannibalism is an exemplary mode of consumerism adopted by underdeveloped peoples. In particular, the Brazilian Indians, immediately after having been ‘discovered’ by the first colonizers, had the rare opportunity of selecting their Portuguese-supplied bishop, Dom Pedro Fernandes Sardinha, who they devoured in a memorable meal. It is not by accident that the revolutionary artists of the twenties—the Modernists—dated their Cannibal Manifesto ‘the year Bishop Sardinha was swallowed.’ Today, we can note that nothing has changed. The traditionally dominant, conservative social classes continue their control of the power structure—and we rediscover cannibalism. Every consumer is reducible, in the last

¹⁶² Schwarz and Gledson, *Misplaced Ideas : Essays on Brazilian Culture* 140.

¹⁶³ Ibid. 141.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

analysis, to cannibalism. The present work relationships, as well as the relationships between people—social, political, and economic—are still basically cannibalistic. Those who can, ‘eat’ others through their consumption of products, or even more directly in sexual relationships. Cannibalism has merely institutionalized itself, cleverly disguised itself. The new heroes, still looking for a collective consciousness, try to devour those who devour us. But still weak, they are themselves transformed into products by the media and consumed.... Meanwhile, voraciously, nations devour their people. *Macunaíma* is the story of a Brazilian devoured by Brazil.¹⁶⁵

Robert Stam has noted the similarities between the cannibalist and the carnivalist metaphors. Both reject ideal standards of beauty, embracing the “ugly, brute, barbarous, illogical.”¹⁶⁶ Both embrace a “dissolving of the boundaries of self through the physical or spiritual commingling self and other.”¹⁶⁷ Both are “rituals of resistance”¹⁶⁸—the former through consuming the enemy, the latter through displacing him. While “modern cannibalism argues for the critical ‘devouring of the scientific technique and artistic information of the superdeveloped metropolitan countries in order to reelaborate them with autonomy,”¹⁶⁹ “parodic carnivalism defended the absorption of metropolitan culture, but in an ironic, ‘doubled-voiced’ mode.”¹⁷⁰ Stam also notes that Oswald de Andrade once called carnival the “religious ritual of the Brazilian race.”¹⁷¹

If the first phase of the Cinema Novo movement had eschewed the comic and the carnivalesque in favor of the austerity of the “aesthetic of hunger,” the tropicalist phase brought back, with a vengeance, the carnivalesque and the tradition of the *chanchada* (Brazilian comedy genre of the 30s-50s).¹⁷² While *Quilombo* was made a little late for the Tropicalist phase of Brazilian film, it exhibits some of its traits. It was a

¹⁶⁵ Quoted in Robert Stam, “Cinematic Images of the Brazilian Indian,” *Brazil in the Making: Facets of National Identity*, eds. Carmen Nava and Ludwig Lauerhass (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2006) 168.

¹⁶⁶ Stam, *Subversive Pleasures : Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism, and Film* 126.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Quoted in Ibid. 129.

¹⁷² Ibid. 145.

notoriously expensive project, costing over 1.2 million dollars. Diegues has noted that this was one of the most expensive films ever made in Brazil.¹⁷³ Some have called it a “superproduction,” though Diegues preferred the euphemism, “super production effort.”¹⁷⁴ The filming location had twelve offices, 200 people working, 500 meters of set. Set design took eight months.¹⁷⁵ The set designer, Luiz Carlos Ripper, had the ambition of transforming the operation into a permanent research laboratory dedicated to “investigating alternative technologies; experimenting with new materials; documenting and disseminating the art of set design.”¹⁷⁶ Diegues applied this abundance of resources and technology to a historical narrative, set in the seventeenth century, about a fugitive slave state. The “aesthetic of hunger”—evident in *Ganga Zumba*—with its embrace of crude technological means of production was a thing of the past. In *Quilombo*, the archaic past combined unabashedly with the most advanced available technology, producing at times, in Stam’s words, “a kind of Afro-Brazilian Disney World.”¹⁷⁷ That the score, deliberately anachronistic electronic samba-rock,¹⁷⁸ was produced by Gilberto Gil, a Tropicalist icon, is more evidence of the Tropicalist inheritance of the film.

As in Tropicalism in general, which turned to the Brazilian anthropophagists for inspiration, we can detect in *Quilombo modernista* resonances. First, the spatialization and concomitant idealization of Palmares reflects anthropophagist principles adapted to the Afro-Brazilian case. In the anthropophagist imagination, the indigenous people of Brazil lived in matriarchal, communalist utopian communities. “The Indian,” to quote Oswald de Andrade, “had no police, no repression, no nervous disorders, no shame at being nude, no class struggle, no slavery.”¹⁷⁹ Similarly Diegues’ Palmares is egalitarian, prosperous, and democratic. Stam calls this the positive pole of the cannibalist metaphor.¹⁸⁰ Second, the other utopian strain of Brazilian *modernismo* reflected the promise of fusing technology and primitivism. *Quilombo* celebrated an exuberant primitivism, making it all the more vivid, exotic, and enticing by employing the latest film and art technology. Third, a

¹⁷³ Fusco, “Choosing between Legend and History: An Interview with Carlos Diegues,” 12.

¹⁷⁴ Pedro Vazquez, “A Cenografia Como Processo Cultural,” *Filme Cultura* 43, Jan.-April (1984): 66.

¹⁷⁵ Raquel Martins Silva, “O Relicário De Celeida Tostes,” Centro de Pesquisa e Documentação de História Contemporânea do Brasil, 2006, 57-8.

¹⁷⁶ Vazquez, “A Cenografia Como Processo Cultural,” 68. (translation mine)

¹⁷⁷ Stam, *Tropical Multiculturalism : A Comparative History of Race in Brazilian Cinema and Culture* 315.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.* 316.

¹⁷⁹ Quoted in Stam, *Subversive Pleasures : Bakhtin, Cultural Criticism, and Film* 145.

¹⁸⁰ Stam, *Tropical Multiculturalism : A Comparative History of Race in Brazilian Cinema and Culture* 238.

corollary to the second, for the Brazilian *modernistas*, *mestiçagem*, hybridity, syncretism were ur-values that characterized, as David Brookshaw has observed, Brazil's people as well as its culture. Brazil's originality, its exceptionalism, owed to its thoroughgoing mixture.¹⁸¹ Diegues adopted this perspective throughout *Quilombo*. The film suggests that the Palmarinos invented soccer, that they practice *capoeira*, that they worship *candomblé* deities, that they dance and sing like people do at carnival. Of course, soccer, the martial art *capoeira*, the syncretic Afro-Brazilian religion of *candomblé*, and carnival are all globally-recognized signifiers of Brazilianness—the very signifiers peddled by the tourism industry, national and international, and repeated by the most provincial know-nothings. Of course, Brazil is famous for something else—its racially mixed population. And Diegues includes two sequences in the film that establish Palmares' multi-racial character. Ganga Zumba pairs up with the white former prostitute, Ana de Ferro (Vera Fischer), in one sequence, and Indigenous visitors (white actors in “Indian-face”) looking for a Land-of-no-evil join the carnival in another.

The problem with Diegues' model is not only that he projects utopia into the past, but that his utopia has a lot in common with the then contemporary carnival. When Coco Fusco asked Diegues about a certain “exoticism” in his representation of Palmares, his reply was unapologetic, turning the implied criticism into an accusation of cultural imperialism: “Maybe in a foreign country it can be seen as folk exploitation, but not in Brazil. When you see something at first that you don't understand, you say to yourself that it is folklore, that it is exotic. But for those for whom the film is made, this is something that they live everyday, that is within them.”¹⁸² In Diegues' hands, Palmares *is* contemporary Brazil—multi-racial, unicultural, festive, and above all, utopian. The film's theme song, which runs over the credits, consolidates this reading: “In Brazil/ a black El Dorado Negro grew/ It was/ It lived, fought, fell, died, and/ rose again/ Rose again/ Many colored peacock, carnival of dreams/ Reborn/ Quilombo, now... yes, you and I.” The preceding series of five static shots, the last shots of the film, are unequivocal: a close-up of a palm frond dripping with rain water; a long shot of a multi-colored parrot in a tree; a close-up of a more traditional palm branch glistening; a long shot of a snake curled up in a tree; a close-up of a rapidly flowing river (figure 4). The iconography combines evocations of a

¹⁸¹ See Brookshaw, *Race and Color in Brazilian Literature*.

¹⁸² Fusco, “Choosing between Legend and History: An Interview with Carlos Diegues,” 14.

biblical paradise with references to first hand accounts of the “discovery” of the new world. The quilombo of Palmares has been so generalized that it is utterly banal: the quilombo is an allegory for Brazil and Brazil a synecdoche for the New World. All three are imagined as the paradise that Columbus described in the journal of his first voyage. The Afro-Brazilian specificity of Palmares—either as a symbol of the first class conflict of Brazilian history or as symbol of a discrete identity—is utterly absent.¹⁸³



Figure 4. New World Paradise. *Quilombo* (Diegues, 1984)

Worse still is that Diegues has also reinscribed racial democracy as both a description of Brazilian reality and a projection of a societal ideal. Racial democracy, which was first articulated by Gilberto Freyre in the 1933 *Casa Grande e Senzala* (*Masters and Slaves*), is the founding myth of modern-day Brazilian national and cultural identity. Freyre argued that widespread racial and cultural mixing in Brazil had left neither slaves, nor masters unchanged. The uniquely Brazilian national identity was a harmonious fusion of three antagonistic

¹⁸³ An interesting side note: Robert Stam has criticized Diegues’ “Nagôcentrism” (315). In both *Ganga Zumba* and *Quilombo*, Diegues turns Palmares from the Angolan Bantu community the historical record has it to be into a West African Nagô (Yoruba) community. The film’s references to *orixás* [deities] of *candomblé* including Xangô are distinctly Nagô in origin. Scholars such as João José Reis have noted, “Colonial and provincial authorities in Brazil, as well as plantation owners, foreign travelers, and native chroniclers, often portrayed Bantus, and especially Angolas, prejudicially. They maintained that Angolas were mentally slow, physically weak, uncivilized and thus more submissive and less anti-White than West Africans. From the seigniorial point of view, Angolas were model slaves” (148). Although Diegues has never professed to be committed to historical accuracy, the choice of the Yoruba tradition is worth thinking about. Reis makes the point that “West [Nagô and Hausa] and Southern [Angolan] Africans developed different patterns of behavior and thought in the New World, and this made each group resist slavery and ethnic oppression in its own way...While the greatest expression of Angolan revolt was their creation of an independent rural life on the quilombo, Nagôs and Hausas opted for violent revolts against power structures on plantations and in cities” (153). In light of this, it is curious that Palmares would be retroactively mythologized as a Nagô community rather than as an Angolan community. Furthermore, in a film celebrating Afro-Brazilian culture, one might expect some attention to the specificity of the tradition memorialized. This is particularly true because Diegues was criticized for this Nagô preference after his first Palmares film, *Ganga Zumba*. His repetition of the oversight must have been deliberate and perhaps owes to his efforts to nationalize Palmares. What better way to accomplish this than to link the quilombo to a nationally-practiced, Yoruba-derived religion like *candomblé*? See Stam, *Tropical Multiculturalism : A Comparative History of Race in Brazilian Cinema and Culture*; Reis, *Slave Rebellion in Brazil : The Muslim Uprising of 1835 in Bahia*.

elements—African, Portuguese, indigenous—incorporated, in body and spirit, in unequal parts. The corollary of this origin story was the idea that because of this allegedly harmonious fusion, discrimination on the basis of race does not exist in Brazil.¹⁸⁴ For obvious reasons, the ideology of racial democracy has been the primary target of Afro-Brazilian activism.

By positing racial democracy as both reality and ideal for Brazil, Diegues has valorized the dominant paradigm of Brazilian national identity. Perhaps Diegues would not object to this reading. He has declared his belief in racial democracy openly. Consider this interview from 1981:

What I do know is that Brazil is a mestizo country. It's an African country exiled in America...I always ask myself: how is it that a segment of Brazilian society like black people, that never had any political existence, that during four centuries was humiliated, treated only like tools, became so victorious from the cultural point of view? The Indian, except in the artesanal aspect, never really took root in Brazil. I think, for this reason, that we have to find the specifically Brazilian in *mestiçagem*. I believe, summarizing, in democratic *mestiçagem*.¹⁸⁵

Diegues, like Freyre, has put the African at the center of national identity. The ambiguities of this position can be discerned in advertisements for *Quilombo* that appeared in Brazilian newspapers of the time. One ad features a series of quotations from various newspapers in France and Brazil. The first three of the list are, tellingly, from French newspapers. *Le Monde* declares, "To love this film is to discover the soul of a country, of a culture, of the art of living."¹⁸⁶ Further down, Edmar Pereira, of *Jornal da Tarde*, writes, "*Quilombo* is dazzling visually, it thrills in those moments when Gilberto Gil's splendid music serves as a complement to its images, it moves by the sensitivity with which it redeems the esthetic of negritude, it provokes solidarity in its intention of putting a race and a culture on the screen, in an epic and grandiose way."¹⁸⁷ It is claimed, first, that the film puts an Afro-Brazilian race and a culture on the screen, and second, that it puts the entire

¹⁸⁴ Gilberto Freyre, *The Masters and the Slaves : (Casa-Grande & Senzala) a Study in the Development of Brazilian Civilization*, 2d English language ed. (New York: Knopf, 1956).

¹⁸⁵ Maria Rosário Caetano, "Carlos Diegues: Depois De Xica, Volta a Filmar Um Tema Negro," *Correio Brasiliense* 1981. (translation mine)

¹⁸⁶ Translation mine.

¹⁸⁷ Translation mine.

country and culture of Brazil on the screen. But to what extent are these mutually exclusive categories? After all, Afro- Brazilian culture has been claimed as Brazilian culture in a long history of nationalization and appropriation.¹⁸⁸

Marking itself as a departure from the materialist histories of Carneiro and Péret, *Quilombo* (a bit like *Arena conta Zumbi*) replaces the class conflict of *Ganga Zumba* with the conflict between the united people of Brazil represented by Palmares and the dictatorship represented by the evil Portuguese colonial forces. *Quilombo*, in effect, nationalizes Zumbi, Palmares, and the quilombo, which become allegories of the national struggle for democracy, which had just recently been restored. By nationalizing a symbol of Afro-Brazilian resistance, the film performs important ideological work for the Brazilian state, a state that must neutralize more than half of its population, which is marginalized and impoverished. Diegues has achieved in the virtual world of the image a harmony that has not been achieved in the world outside representation.

XIII

Perhaps the most ironic and puzzling feature of the production of *Quilombo* is that Diegues sought the assistance of three significant figures in the Brazilian black movement of the time: Lélia Gonzales, Joel Rufino dos Santos, and Beatriz do Nascimento.¹⁸⁹ Lélia Gonzalez published a review of the film in *Folha de São Paulo* in the year of its release. She rails against those “liberals from the left,” those false spokespeople for the oppressed, for knowing nothing about black culture, for scientistically expecting historical fidelity from an artistic rendering. Ultimately Gonzalez sides with a French reviewer, Louis Marcorelles, whose words were so compelling that they were included in the promotional materials: “To love this film is to discover the soul of a country, of a culture, of the art of living.” Indeed, Gonzalez’s informal impression is that the film was embraced in the poor Northern Zone and suburbs of Rio where people left the cinemas excited and *proud*.

¹⁸⁸ See Peter Fry, *Para Inglês Ver : Identidade E Política Na Cultura Brasileira* (Rio de Janeiro: Zahar Editores, 1982); Edward Eric Telles, "Ethnic Boundaries and Political Mobilization among African Brazilians: Comparisons with the U.S. Case," *Racial Politics in Contemporary Brazil*, ed. Michael George Hanchard (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1999); Fry, *A Persistência Da Raca : Ensaio Antropológico Sobre O Brasil E a África Austral*; Livio Sansone, *Blackness without Ethnicity : Constructing Race in Brazil*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2003); Patrícia de Santana Pinho, *Reinvenções Da África Na Bahia*, Crítica Contemporânea, 1a ed. (São Paulo, Brazil: Annablume, 2004).

¹⁸⁹ José Carlos Avellar, "'Quilombo': Uma Epopéia Brasileira À Espera Do Seu Público," *Jornal do Brasil* 1984.

“*Quilombo*,” she writes, is not a film about Palmares, but a film with Palmares. The Palmares of *our* everyday lives, despite the Domingos Jorge Velho of the system that exploit and oppress us... is still there, nurturing the flame of our joy in living, singing, dancing, and smiling.”¹⁹⁰ And so Gonzalez would like to have it both ways: *Quilombo* is both a film that reflects the “soul of a country” and that reflects “our [Afro-Brazilian] joy in living, singing, dancing, and smiling.” In other words, it is a national film *and* an Afro-Brazilian film. Perhaps we could say that Diegues, rather than “whitening” Brazil, has been “blackening” it. The national character owes to the African presence that has swallowed the Indian and the Portuguese for dinner. Still, to the extent that Brazilian culture, in this perspective, owes to Afro-Brazilian culture, the dream of a discrete, separate Afro-Brazilian identity slips out of reach. Brazilian national identity is then syncretic, hybrid, mixed with perhaps different proportions of its constitutive elements from those proposed both by the Anthropophagists and by Freyre. Moreover, doesn’t the Afro-Brazilian contribution to the mix—as described by Diegues, Gonzalez, Marcorelles—evoke the primitivist traits so exalted by the Surrealists, the Anthropophagists, and Freyre?

On the face of it, it seems hard to reconcile the project of *Quilombo* with the objectives of the black movement in Brazil. Since the 1970s, the black movement had been committed to fighting the ideology of racial democracy. It has argued that the stark racial inequality of Brazil must be blamed on persistent yet unacknowledged discrimination and also that the belief in harmonious race relations has prevented Afro-Brazilian political mobilization. But the black movement has also been concerned to recuperate black historical figures, and most notably Zumbi, as a way of promoting a *distinct* Black racial and cultural identity.¹⁹¹ There is much to suggest that this strategy has enabled the sort of nationalization that is on display in Diegues’ *Quilombo*, and that is ultimately antithetical to the black movement’s own objectives. While certain

¹⁹⁰ Lelia Gonzalez, “Axé/ Muntu, Quilombo!,” *Folha de São Paulo* 1984. (translation mine)

¹⁹¹ While Flávio dos Santos Gomes suggests there are signs that black activists writing in the paulista “black press” in the 1920s were already beginning to take an interest in the quilombo as an ethnic symbol, he asserts that “it was only at the end of the 1970s that black activists reach an explicit crossroads in the construction and elaboration of the idea of the quilombo” (205). Gomes, “Ainda Sobre Os Quilombos: Repensando a Construção De Símbolos De Indentidade Étnica No Brasil.” (translation mine) On the other hand, the most important black movement activist and originator of the “quilombismo” philosophy, Abdias do Nascimento, edited a newspaper in the late 1940s titled, *Quilombo*. For more on this, see Michael George Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power: The Movimento Negro of Rio De Janeiro and São Paulo, Brazil, 1945-1988* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1994). The reconstruction of the history of Brazilian black activism’s appropriation of the quilombo as movement symbol would be a worthwhile project.

black movement figures were interested in a spatialized, utopian quilombo, they were also interested in the cultural distinctiveness of the quilombo practices. That interest, as I have shown above, is betrayed in *Quilombo*.

The stakes of the rise of the symbolic career of Zumbi has been most clearly and unpopularity articulated by the U.S. political scientist Michael Hanchard, in his 1994 book, *Orpheus and Power: The Movimento Negro of Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo*. Hanchard sets himself the task of explaining why there has been no “social movement generated by Afro-Brazilians in the post-World War II period that corresponds to social movements in the United States, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Caribbean.”¹⁹² He argues that the relative weakness of racial consciousness of persistent and demonstrable racial inequality in Brazil is due to the strength of the national ideology of racial democracy, which, having suffered the blows of twenty years of scholarship that contests its most basic premises, remains alive in the hearts of average Brazilians. So far so good. But Hanchard goes on to argue that the dominant strategy of the black movement of the 1970s in Brazil to combat the ideology of racial democracy paradoxically reinscribes it. The black movement had emphasized a culturalist politics in which “Afro-Brazilian and Afro-Diasporic symbols and artifacts become reified and commodified,” divorced from “their histories and the attendant modes of consciousness that brought them into being.”¹⁹³ The exaltation of Zumbi and Palmares is at the center of his critique.

... [E]lements of what I call culturalism, in other words, the fetichization of “black” cultural practices as the only means of politics, inform an important tendency, [at least for me,] of the black movement, that I think can be exemplified by the glorification of Zumbi, the idealization of an African and Afro-Brazilian past and a preoccupation with the study of slavery at the almost total expense of other aspects and dimensions of Brazilian racial politics.¹⁹⁴

¹⁹² Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power: The Movimento Negro of Rio De Janeiro and São Paulo, Brazil, 1945-1988* 6.

¹⁹³ Ibid. 21.

¹⁹⁴ Michael George Hanchard, “Resposta a Luiza Bairos,” *Afro-Ásia* 18 (1996): 228. (translation mine)

When Hanchard's book was published, it was roundly criticized. The critiques, in one way or another, all accused Hanchard of cultural imperialism.¹⁹⁵ His criticisms of the black movement looked to many as an instance of imposing the standards and practices of the U.S. civil rights movement and the African liberation struggles on the foreign context of Brazil. In some ways the accusations of black movements activists, and the critique by Pierre Bourdieu and L  ic Wacquant, who made Hanchard the occasion for their attack on US academic imperialism,¹⁹⁶ miss Hanchard's point. Hanchard asserted that it was precisely the culturalist threads of Negritude, Pan-Africanism, and Black Power that had been adopted in Brazil where they were particularly unsuited, from a strategic point of view, *because* Brazil's national ideology—racial democracy—was founded on the legitimacy of African and Afro-Brazilian expressive culture.¹⁹⁷ Using the work of British anthropologist Peter Fry, Hanchard argues that culturalist politics is a particularly bad strategy because of Brazil's long tradition of nationalizing Afro-Brazilian artifacts and cultural practices including *candombl  *, samba, and even the national dish *feijoada*.¹⁹⁸ The nationalization of such symbols, the argument goes, undermines a possible source of cultural identification. Cultural identification—a sense of a distinct Afro-Brazilian cultural identity—is in turn thought by the black movement to be necessary for a race-based movement for the redress of actual, severe racial discrimination and inequality. After all, if racial democracy offered a hybridized, “miscegenated” vision of national identity where the African element, though a major term of the dialectic, was still combined with other elements,—the only tact for the black movement committed to contesting the ideology of racial democracy was to insist on the purity of Afro-Brazilian history and culture, just as the primitivists had done with non-Western cultures, though with different aims. Nationalization works against this political strategy, perhaps precisely because of this convergence with primitivist essentialism. And, as we have seen, cultural symbols, practices, even history, turn out to be easy targets for nationalization. For Fry, the solution is to accept Brazilian syncretic national identity

¹⁹⁵ See Luiza Bairos, "Orfeu E Poder: Uma Perspectiva Afro-Americana Sobre a Pol  tica Racial No Brasil," *  fro-Asia* 17 (1996).

¹⁹⁶ See Bourdieu and Wacquant, "The Cunning of Imperialist Reason."

¹⁹⁷ Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power: The Movimento Negro of Rio De Janeiro and S  o Paulo, Brazil, 1945-1988*. For more on the intelligentsia's recognition of Afro-Brazilian symbols and ideas between 1890-1940, see Dain Borges, "The Recognition of Afro-Brazilian Symbols and Ideas, 1890-1940," *Luso-Brazilian Review* 32.2 (1995).

¹⁹⁸ Fry, *Para Ingl  s Ver: Identidade E Pol  tica Na Cultura Brasileira*. For Fry's most recent rejoinder, which makes some (minor) adjustments to the 1982 argument, see Fry, *A Persist  ncia Da Ra  a: Ensaios Antropol  gicos Sobre O Brasil E a   frica Austral*.

as a fact and to find other strategies—that do not depend on a distinct, Afro-Brazilian identity—to fight racial oppression. For Hanchard, the solution is a Civil Rights movement, on the model of the United States, that pursues, through juridical avenues and through mass protest, racial justice. Both eschew a culturalist politics in Brazil.

For the black movement, Palmares presented an opportunity to found an African state in Brazil, that could serve to undergird a discrete, separate Afro-Brazilian cultural identity comparable to the discrete Indigenous cultural identity that was already taken for granted in Brazilian arts and letters. Like its indigenous analogue, this Afro-Brazilian identity would be something to be proud of. Indeed, what mattered for the black movement was on the one hand the African character of the black state: Palmares represented an African state transplanted to the New World. On the other hand, Palmares came to represent a utopian alternative to the slave society of colonial Brazil. We should note here that the interest had shifted away from the early Marxist historiographic emphasis on the *conflict* between Palmares and the colonial slave regime, a conflict between irreconcilable interests, and on the utopian impulse for freedom. The new focus was Palmares as a model African state in Brazil. The character of Palmares society—how African was it? how egalitarian was it? —took on new significance. While the earlier Marxist appropriation of the historical episode of Palmares (Carneiro, Péret, Boal, Diegues’ *Ganga Zumba*) had tried to recuperate the *agency* and animating aspirations of the slaves who had fled and formed quilombos, they cared little about the moral character of these maroons. Subsequent approaches to memorialization tried to claim the superior moral character of the quilombolas, Palmares became a utopian space—the first democratic, egalitarian, multi-racial, unicultural, festive state of Brazilian history.

XIV

As Palmares took on shape and form in the years that followed the 1947 publication of Carneiro’s book, the political meaning of Palmares was considerably transformed. The pre-history of Palmares and Zumbi’s meteoric rise in Brazilian political life reflects the conjuncture of peculiar Brazilian historical circumstances and the details of the actual historical episode that made it especially apt for appropriation. This chapter has

tried to provide a concrete elaboration of that process. The aim has been to answer João Carlos Rodrigues' question about Brazilian cinema: Why did our cineastes depart so from the historical record? Why did they not represent the Malê slave rebellion of 1835 or black participation in the Paraguayan war or the repatriation of Afro-Brazilian families to Africa or the Revolt of the Whip? What Rodrigues identified as an attraction to separatism, I have traced back to Marxist historiography. What Rodrigues complained were the culturalist preoccupations of Brazilian filmmakers treating black themes, I have claimed are a result of the encounter between primitivist art movements like Anthropophagism and Tropicalism. What Rodrigues commends as *Quilombo's* resolution of the "metaphoric problem of [black] political separatism," I see as the film's embrace of racial democracy, primitivism, and its disinheritance of politics. Perhaps our most controversial disagreement is over culturalism. While Rodrigues thinks that he reproves the media *intelligentsia* for their penchant for African "ancestral cultural characteristics," their penchant for the *atabaque* and the *inhame*, and approves of Diegues' syncretism, his penchant for carnival, *capoeira*, *candomblé*,—I think primitivism comes in one form. On the other hand, Rodrigues has raised an important question about historical representation. He has refused to accede to static accounts of history tellingly expressed in slogans like "300 years of Zumbi." He has not taken historical representation for granted.

My story has been about the efforts to put history to political use. The point is not that we should bury our historical heroes or deplore the ahistorical appropriations of the past and rally for the definitive end to such appropriations. The point is rather to consider what the forms of these appropriations tell us about the state of things, what silences they reveal, and what anxieties they try to assuage. As the Brazilian historian of quilombos, Flávio dos Santos Gomes, writes, "I would say that many historians (and anthropologists) that analyzed quilombos placed themselves before a problem-solution and not before a problem-problem."¹⁹⁹ We do well to maintain a lively sense that historical appropriation is always a "problem" and never a simple solution. That is what I have tried to do in considering the case of Palmares and Zumbi in the Brazilian imagination.

¹⁹⁹ Gomes, "Ainda Sobre Os Quilombos: Repensando a Construção De Símbolos De Indentidade Étnica No Brasil," 206. (translation mine)

3.0 QUILOMBO AND UTOPIA, PART TWO: FROM THE AESTHETIC OF LABOR TO *QUILOMBISMO*

I

There are two main cinematic traditions of representing the quilombo. The first is a tradition of fictional films that depict quilombos of the historical past.¹ This tradition, which was discussed in Chapter One, includes films like *Ganga Zumba* (1963) and *Quilombo* (1984). The second is a tradition of documentary films that represent contemporary quilombos. “Remanescentes [remnants] de quilombos,” as these contemporary quilombos are often called, are rural communities inhabited by the descendents of escaped slaves. Both of these cinematic traditions emerge in the first phase of the Cinema Novo movement. *Aruanda* (Línduarte Noronha, 1960), a twenty-minute documentary about a rural black community in Paraíba, is the film that is widely considered to have inaugurated the Cinema Novo movement as well as the Paraíba film movement.² Carlos Diegues’s 1963 film *Ganga Zumba*, about Palmares--the largest historical quilombo of Brazilian history--is one of the four films referred to by name in Glauber Rocha’s 1965 manifesto, “An Esthetic of Hunger.” Like the *sertão* and the *favela*, the quilombo was one of the privileged spaces of the Cinema Novo filmscape. In

¹ Although *quilombo* and *quilombolas* (maroons) are foreign words, in the remainder of this chapter I will not italicize either.

² There are important questions to be asked of the link between the Paraíba school of documentary and Cinema Novo. These questions are historical (e.g. How much contact did the filmmakers from each movement have with each other?), aesthetic (e.g. Are there differences between how these schools approach the similar topic of Brazil’s northeastern *sertão*?), and political (e.g. What does it mean for Paraíba filmmakers to make films about Paraíba? What does it mean for Paulistas to do so?). For treatments of the Paraíba school and cinema from/of the northeast, see Wills Leal, *O Nordeste No Cinema* ([João Pessoa]/Salvador: Universidade Federal da Paraíba/Universidade Federal da Bahia, 1982); Wills Leal, *O Discurso Cinematográfico Dos Paraibanos, Ou, a História Do Cinema Da/Na Paraíba*, Ed. comemorativa dos 50 anos de nascimento do autor e do seu ingresso na Academia Paraibana de Letras. ed. (João Pessoa, PB: W. Leal, 1989); José Marinho de Oliveira, *Dos Homens E Das Pedras : O Ciclo Do Cinema Documentário Paraibano, 1959-1979* (Niterói, RJ: Editora da Universidade Federal Fluminense, 1998); Célia Aparecida Ferreira Tolentino, *O Rural No Cinema Brasileiro*, 1a ed. (São Paulo, SP: Editora UNESP, 2002).

what follows I will focus on the documentary tradition inaugurated by Linduarte Noronha's *Aruanda* and pursued by Vladimir Carvalho in the '60s and '70s. This tradition represents an older anti-culturalist approach to the quilombo that was soon superceded by the culturalist appropriation of the quilombo by the black movement, by filmmakers like Carlos Diegues, and later, by the Brazilian state.³ I hope to restore a sense of the dynamism of the history of the quilombo in Brazilian racial politics by locating this documentary tradition within a broader controversy over Afro-Brazilian identity and culture.

The present chapter investigates a neglected Brazilian cinematic tradition of representing the quilombo. My story is in part about the conflict between the Marxism of Noronha and Carvalho, the utopian Afrocentrism of the black movement, and the liberal multiculturalism of the Brazilian state. But it is also about the invention of traditions and the efforts to put history to political use. A similar story has been told about Malcolm X by Adolph Reed and might also be told about Che Guevara and Frida Kahlo.⁴

The heart of this chapter is a series of film readings. But the importance of these films can only be seen when they are situated within the broader controversy around black identity in Brazilian society. My first task is therefore to provide the contemporary context, a task I undertake in Section II. It will emerge that the contemporary understanding of the quilombo in Brazil is radically different from the one at work in the documentary tradition of Noronha and Carvalho, which is the subject of Sections III-VI. By recalling the latter forgotten tradition, I hope to destabilize the received view, or common sense, about the relation between race, land, culture, and identity in Brazilian society.

³ I am using Michael Hanchard's notion of culturalism. He defines "culturalism" as "the equation of cultural practices with the material, expressive, artifactual elements of cultural production, and the neglect of normative political aspects of a cultural process" (21). "In culturalist practices, Afro-Brazilian and Afro-Diasporic symbols and artifacts become reified and commodified; culture becomes a thing, not a deep political process" (21). See Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power: The Movimento Negro of Rio De Janeiro and São Paulo, Brazil, 1945-1988*. "Folklorization" is a similar concept. For treatments of "folklorization," see Isar Godreau, "Changing Space, Making Race: Distance, Nostalgia, and Folklorization of Blackness in Puerto Rico," *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* 9.3 (2002); Greg Urban and Joel Sherzer, *Nation-States and Indians in Latin America*, Symposia on Latin America Series, 1st ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1991). For another less critical treatment of objectification in the sphere of Afro-Brazilian religion, see Roger Sansi-Roca, *Fetishes and Monuments: Afro-Brazilian Art and Culture in the 20th Century*, Remapping Cultural History (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007).

⁴ See Adolph L. Reed, *Stirrings in the Jug: Black Politics in the Post-Segregation Era* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).

II

In a 1952 UNESCO essay, Claude Lévi-Strauss foresaw that the fight against racism would not end with the demise of scientific racism, but would migrate into the realm of culture:

...the nature of the diversity [of cultures] must be investigated even at the risk of allowing the racial prejudices whose biological foundation has so lately been destroyed to develop again on new grounds. It would be useless to argue the man on the street out of attaching an intellectual or moral significance to the fact of having a black or white skin, straight or frizzy hair, unless we had an answer to another question which, as experience proves he will immediately ask: “if there are no innate racial aptitudes, how can we explain the fact that the white man’s civilization has made the tremendous advances with which we are all familiar while the civilizations of the coloured peoples have lagged behind, some of them having come only half way along the road, and others being still thousands or ten of thousands of years behind the times?” We cannot therefore claim to have formulated a convincing denial of the inequality of the human *races*, so long as we fail to consider the problem of the inequality—or diversity—of human *cultures*, which is in fact—however unjustifiably—closely associated in the public mind. ⁵

Once cultural sophistication prevails—over, for example, cranial density---as the measure of racial superiority, the stakes of historians’ and anthropologists’ assessments of non-white societies of the past and of the present pass from the merely academic to the directly political. This is the case despite the precariousness of the premises on which the association between race and culture are based.⁶ In political matters, unlike scholastic ones, the views of the “man on the street” are of first importance. Surely it is no accident, then, that movements against racism like the black movement in Brazil have turned to the historical record for inspiration. This is the kind of consideration that can help us to understand how the fight against racial

⁵ Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Race and History* (Paris: UNESCO, 1952) 6-7.

⁶ (e.g. the legitimacy of race as a scientific category).

inequality and discrimination in Brazil came to involve so centrally the question of the quilombos, or maroon societies, of the colonial period and their present day incarnations.

Abdias do Nascimento, the most important twentieth century Afro-Brazilian activist against racial discrimination in Brazil—perhaps having taken to heart the question of the man on the street—undertook to recuperate “the living presence of Mother Africa” in the memory of Afro-Brazilians. But unlike Levi-Strauss, Nascimento was not about to concede the “inequality” of human cultures—or, at least, not the inequality of African cultures.⁷ Thus, Nascimento disputed the obviousness of claim for the “tremendous advances” of the “white man’s civilization” compared to the “lagging behind” of the “civilization of the coloured.”⁸ In 1980, Abdias do Nascimento introduced the term “quilombismo” to an English-speaking audience in an article in the *Journal of Black Culture*. At the time, Nascimento was teaching at SUNY Buffalo in a self-imposed exile from Brazil. He had embraced a Brazilian brand of Pan-Africanism. “Quilombismo” was the term coined by Nascimento to designate an alternative Afro-Brazilian political movement. Its goal was the establishment of a “Quilombist National State, inspired in the model of the Republic of Palmares.”⁹ Palmares was a seventeenth century maroon state with almost 20,000 inhabitants that survived for close to a century, beating back the incursions of Dutch and Portuguese forces intent on destroying this native threat to colonial power. “We trust in the mental integrity of Black people, and we believe in the reinventions of ourselves and our history. A reinvention of Afro-Brazilians whose life is founded on our own historical experiences, built by utilizing critical and inventive knowledge of our own social and economic institutions, battered as they have been by colonialism and racism. In sum, to reconstruct in the present a society directed toward the future, but taking into account what is still useful and positive in the stores of our past.”¹⁰ What for Nascimento is “useful and positive” is an untainted African communalism that thrived in Brazilian quilombos. “African life forms are

⁷ For example, Nascimento writes, “In different fields, with diverse perspectives, the energies of these eminent Africans [including Cheikh Anta Diop, Molefi K. Asanti, Wole Soyinka] channel themselves toward the exorcism of the falsities, distortions and negations that Europeans for so long have been weaving around Africa, with the purpose of obscuring or erasing our memory of the wisdom, scientific and philosophical knowledge and realizations of the peoples of Black African origin” (143).

⁸ Levi-Strauss, on the other hand, accepts the basic premise of the man on the street—that certain civilizations have achieved different degrees of advancement. But he does not explain this fact as a reflection of innate inferiority, as the man on the street is inclined to. Nor does he turn to social evolutionism: in other words, the solution is not a story about different stages along a linear, progressive path of development. Instead, Levi-Strauss tries to give a non-teleological, purely historical account of the diversity of human cultures in various contexts of isolation and contact with other cultures. See Lévi-Strauss, *Race and History*.

⁹ Abdias do Nascimento, “Quilombismo: An Afro-Brazilian Political Alternative,” *Journal of Black Studies* 11.2 (1980): 168.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*: 160.

seen as non-dynamic, immobilized and silenced before history. This petrified vision of Africa and her cultures is purely cerebral fiction. Quilombismo intends to redeem from this negativist definition our sense of socioeconomic protagonism and organization, conceived to enrich and serve human existence; organization that existed in Africa and was practiced by Africans in Brazil. Contemporary Brazilian society can benefit from the Quilombist model.”¹¹ In Nascimento’s reconstruction, the historical quilombo is a suitable model for his alternative national state because it is (a) communalist and thus anti-capitalist (b) distinctly African in culture and tradition (c) not a foreign model, but an indigenous one.¹²

Within Nascimento’s framework, the contemporary quilombo emerges with new resonance. Contemporary quilombos, or “remanescentes de quilombos” are, strictly speaking, rural communities of descendents of maroons.¹³ They occupy an important place in Nascimento’s story for they are the link between the societies of escaped slaves during the colonial period and present-day rural black communities in Brazil. In some sense, these contemporary quilombos must be rehabilitated if the quilombo is going to play the galvanizing role Nascimento has ascribed to it. Nascimento’s description of the contemporary quilombo is revealing: “Our Brazil is so vast, so much still unknown and ‘underdiscovered,’ that we can suppose, without a large margin of error, that there must exist many rural Black communities, isolated, without ostensive connection to the small cities and villages in the interior of the country. These are tiny localities, unlinked to the mainstream of the country’s life, maintaining African or quasi-African lifestyles and habits, under a collective agricultural regimen of subsistence or survival.”¹⁴ Nascimento casts contemporary quilombos in the mold of the historical quilombos, again emphasizing a distinctively African character preserved across centuries as a result of a virtually complete isolation from the rest of the country. But in

¹¹ Ibid.: 167.

¹² One odd feature of Nascimento’s formulation is that the quilombo emerges as a model that is simultaneously distinctly Brazilian and purely African. There is nothing syncretic or hybrid in his quilombo. Still, the distinct Brazilianness of the quilombo model is not irrelevant. But what does this Brazilianness amount to? In what sense is the Quilombo a Brazilian form? Merely, because it existed on Brazilian soil? Perhaps this stress is explained by Nascimento’s intended audience. His audience is somewhat nationalist and an Afro-Brazilian tradition would be more palatable (even if not syncretic), more readily owned as their own, than one borrowed directly from Africa. For an audience that feels itself to be Brazilian, he must provide a way for it to be both Brazilian and African—uncontaminated by the European and yet with longstanding ties to Brazil. The quilombo as Nascimento has conceived of it accomplishes this.

¹³ In practice, it is more complicated than this. See Adelmir Fiabani, *Mato, Palhoça E Pilão : O Quilombo, Da Escravidão Às Comunidades Remanescentes, 1532-2004*, 1a ed. (São Paulo, SP: Editora Expressão Popular, 2005).

¹⁴ Nascimento, “Quilombismo: An Afro-Brazilian Political Alternative,” 156.

fact, there is much debate about several of Nascimento's key assertions regarding both historical and contemporary quilombos. How isolated and autonomous were quilombo communities from colonial society and how isolated are they from the "mainstream of the country's life"? How distinctly culturally African were and are these communities? And furthermore how homogenously black were and are they? How egalitarian were they really (according to some sources, Palmares had slaves)?¹⁵ These are of course empirical questions, and historians and archaeologists have tended to answer them in ways that contradict Nascimento's claims.¹⁶

Of course, there are understandable strategic considerations that could illuminate Nascimento's apocryphal reconstruction. The most fundamental is the question of black identity in Brazil. Risking accusations of neo-Freyreism, anthropologist Peter Fry has argued against significant sectors of the black movement that believe in the celebration of racial identities and that seek to strengthen black identity in Brazil.¹⁷ While the black movements in Brazil have, for strategic reasons, emphasized black identity, Fry argues that that emphasis has been misplaced and largely ineffectual precisely because it takes for granted the existence of an exclusively black Brazilian identity. According to Fry, "the policy of cultural integration effected with such diligence and even violence in Brazil has been so successful that the identities that Guimarães [black movement sociologist] would like to see valued have first to be constructed. And this is indeed what the ethnographic record suggests. The history of the black movement(s) in Brazil has largely been the history of not-resoundingly-successful attempts to construct a black identity to which people of color would feel impelled to adhere."¹⁸ This view has been echoed in the recent work of the sociologist Edward Telles. Telles' work is based on research that has shown that sustained political mobilization depends on a strong sense of a shared ethnic identity. That identity may be established by common language, religion, skin color, or nationality; and the more of these markers that are operative, the stronger the ethnic

¹⁵ See Péret, "Que Foi O Quilombo De Palmares?."

¹⁶ For example, see Elisa Pereira Reis, Maria Hermínia Tavares de Almeida, Peter Fry, Associação Nacional de Pós-Graduação e Pesquisa em Ciências Sociais (Brazil) and Associação Nacional de Pós-Graduação e Pesquisa em Ciências Sociais (Brazil). *Encontro, Política E Cultura : Visões Do Passado E Perspectivas Contemporâneas*, Ciências Sociais Hoje (São Paulo: ANPOCS Editora Hucitec, 1996); Flávio dos Santos Gomes, *Palmares : Escravidão E Liberdade No Atlântico* (São Paulo: Contexto, 2005); João José Reis and Flávio dos Santos Gomes, *Liberdade Por Um Fio : História Dos Quilombos No Brasil* (São Paulo, Brazil: Companhia das Letras, 1996); Pedro Paulo A. Funari, Charles E. Orser and Solange Nunes de Oliveira Schiavetto, *Identidades, Discurso E Poder : Estudos Da Arqueologia Contemporânea*, 1a ed. (São Paulo, SP, Brasil: FAPESP : Annablume, 2005); Péret, Ponge and Maestri Filho, *O Quilombo Dos Palmares*.

¹⁷ Fry, "Politics, Nationality, and the Meanings Of "Race" In Brazil," 11.

¹⁸ Ibid.: 12.

identity. In comparing Afro-Brazilian identity to African American identity, Telles argues that “despite the closer ties to African culture found in Brazil, there is a far deeper sense of a separate ethnic identity for the African American population due to clear boundaries from the dominant culture; such boundaries are much less distinct in Brazil. Whether or not black cultures in the Americas can be linked to Africa, in the United States, there is a tenacious African American ethnic identity based on cultural distinctiveness, while the formation of an analogous identity in Brazil has been much more ambiguous for most of the Afro-Brazilian population.”¹⁹ The construction of an Afro-Brazilian identity has been complicated by the long history of national appropriation of symbols of blackness. Fry again, “[U]nder the canopy of racial democracy, many cultural touchstones, such as feijoada (Brazil’s national dish based on black beans and pork), samba, capoeira (a balletic martial art), that can be traced back to Africa have become symbols of Brazilian nationality.”²⁰ Abdias do Nascimento’s “quilombismo” should be understood within this context—as part of the effort to construct a distinct and pure black Brazilian identity with roots in Africa and minimal European influence. Thus, an Afro-Brazilian identity with a basis in the quilombo would be clearly distinguishable from the hybridized Brazilian identity—a harmonious fusion of African, Indigenous, and European cultures—associated with the work of Gilberto Freyre, and would thus form a more solid foundation for black political mobilization.

Nascimento was not alone in his efforts. Indeed, the contemporary quilombo became a central locus for black movement activism after the dictatorship ceded power in the late 1980s. By the time the new democratic constitution was being drafted, in 1988, the question of contemporary quilombos or “remanescentes do quilombos” had come to the fore thanks to the agitation of the black movement. The new constitution would grant land title to “remanescentes de quilombos” on much the same grounds that indigenous communities had long been granted land rights: as part of the state’s commitment to protect cultural rights, heritage, and expression. While article 215 pledges to protect “the full exercise of cultural rights” including “the expressions of popular, Indian and Afro-Brazilian cultures,” article 216 defines

¹⁹ Telles, “Ethnic Boundaries and Political Mobilization among African Brazilians: Comparisons with the U.S. Case,” 82-3..

²⁰ Fry, “Politics, Nationality, and the Meanings Of “Race” In Brazil,” 13. Also see Fry, Para Inglês Ver : Identidade E Política Na Cultura Brasileira; Fry, A Persistência Da Raça : Ensaios Antropológicos Sobre O Brasil E a África Austral.

Brazilian cultural heritage as “assets of a material and immaterial nature” and includes the promise to protect as national heritage “[a]ll documents and sites bearing historical reminiscence to the ancient communities of runaway slaves.” Furthermore, the Palmares Cultural Foundation, initially tied to the Ministry of Culture, was given the task of overseeing the process of granting title to quilombo land. The culturalist orientation of the constitution mimicked the culturalism of Nascimento’s “quilombismo,” which ironically fit a long standing pattern in Brazilian racial politics: namely, the state’s willingness to embrace the presence of African-derived expressive culture while scorning real life black Brazilians.²¹ So long as the battle for contemporary quilombo rights was fundamentally a fight for cultural recognition and valorization in the Brazilian tradition, different parties could all agree. But complications soon arose because the definition of quilombo at the time the constitution was being drafted was conveniently quite narrow: it was limited to actual descendents of actual fugitives from slavery. After all, the state’s intention was not a broad land reform initiative. While there were many rural and urban Afro-Brazilian communities living and working land to which they had no legal right, only a fraction of these were verifiably “remanescentes de quilombos.” And how would the “authentic” quilombos be distinguished from just any rural community of black peasants? Anthropologists would be brought in to make the crucial distinctions. And how would they do this? They would look for the presence of “ethnic identity,” “ethnic territory,” a “myth of origins,” a “quilombo memory,” and “significant elements of ‘black traditional culture.’”²²

One can imagine the sort of incentives created by this state policy. Take the community of Rio das Rão in Bahia as an example. For years the community had been fighting, with little success, against a local rich landowner for title to land that had been farmed by the community for over 200 years. The quilombo clause of the constitution offered the community a new avenue: “The community was no longer composed of ‘workers on the land’ pressing for agrarian reform, but of quilombolas demanding the recognition of their

²¹ See Hanchard, *Orpheus and Power: The Movimento Negro of Rio De Janeiro and São Paulo, Brazil, 1945-1988*.

²² J.F. Véran, “Quilombos and Land Rights in Contemporary Brazil,” *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 25.4 (2002). See Jan Hoffman French, “Performing Slave Descent: Cultural Heritage and the Right to Land in Brazil,” *Cultural Heritage and Human Rights*, ed. Helaine Silverman (New York: Springer, 2007). Jan Hoffman French offers much the same account. According to her, anthropologists looked for a) signs of communal land use in a rural setting, b) residents who could remember the slave past, c) signs of long-term land use, d) “cultural practices that could be construed as ethnic markers” (112). French also notes that the policy requiring visits by anthropologists was changed in 2003, resulting in some debate about the drawbacks of relying on self-identification alone.

territory.”²³ This was the revised strategy adopted by a new generation of leaders. But for the most part, those who occupied this land cared little about this quilombo business; they wanted freedom from the machinations of the evil landowner who was burning their fields and threatening their livelihoods. Here is the anthropologist Jean-Francois Verán’s summation of the shift in Rio das Rãs: “The ethnicization of the discourse coincided with a reorganization of the community around a quilombola association. Young politicized leaders replaced the traditional leaders. Having perfectly identified the stakes surrounding their new quilombola image, they quickly learned to shape it to the one produced by the distorting mirror handed to them. To be visible, they had to conform.”²⁴ Other examples include the community of Mocambo in the state of Sergipe. Anthropologist Jan Hoffman French has carefully chronicled the ways the in which finally acquiring land title through the quilombo clause has resulted in profound changes to the community’s sense and practices of identity, which before the quilombo clause made no mention of slavery.²⁵

Even as black activists and their congressional representatives have become aware that in order for the new quilombo laws to serve their constituencies the definition of quilombo needed to be expanded, the culturalist basis of the quilombo designation has not been questioned. It is the requirement of a historical link to actual maroons that has been contested and waived. ²⁶

Perhaps the most striking irony of this story of contemporary quilombos in Brazil is that the state and black activists are for the most part in agreement, though perhaps for different reasons. Both parties wish to cast the contemporary quilombo as a survival from the past that should be protected because of the distinctiveness of its African culture and practices. Jan Hoffman French has eloquently articulated the complexities of this state-black movement conjuncture:

In Brazil, the primary enunciated goal of both the government and black movement activists is to guarantee that impoverished rural black communities are inserted into the national state with full citizenship rights while their way of life and cultural practices are protected—a goal

²³ Verán, "Quilombos and Land Rights in Contemporary Brazil," 23.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ French, "Performing Slave Descent: Cultural Heritage and the Right to Land in Brazil."

²⁶ Ibid. So that, in the case of the community of Mocambo, it was able to use the quilombo clause to gain land rights without any evidence suggesting that its residents were indeed descended from runaway slaves (114).

of newly conceived multicultural, pluralistic Brazilian society. Nevertheless, even if unintentional, an effect of these efforts has been a form of folklorization, particularly when African cultural survivals are invoked to support quilombo claims. Moreover, the desires of the members of quilombo communities may not entirely mesh with the images of them as a link to the past. For them, government recognition brings the promise of modernization—electricity, running water, better roads, technical assistance for agricultural production, and health care—all of which are part of the implicit promise that comes with recognition and land. The implementation of those promises does not necessarily comport with the expectations associated with the folkloric aspects of the requirements for recognition and can create a gap that is often filled with feuding, disgruntlement, and the exacerbation of factional fighting within the quilombos.²⁷

The centrality of “African cultural survivals” for both the state and the black movement owe to different causes. For the state, there has been a long history of using the valorization of Afro-Brazilian culture to build national unity and diffuse social tensions.²⁸ For the black movement, the objective has been to construct a distinct Afro-Brazilian identity that would serve as the galvanizing basis for political mobilization. Still, culture has ironically served both these projects simultaneously.

But the quilombo was not always linked to culture in this way. In the discussion that follows I will examine a very different account of the quilombo.

III

I went to Brazil in 2005 in search of a body of films that I had read about in a book by Robert Stam, *Tropical Multiculturalism*.²⁹ These were films about quilombos—some were dramatized historical epics that achieved wide release and robust critical reception like Carlos Diegues’ *Quilombo*; others were short documentaries

²⁷ Ibid. 113.

²⁸ See Rita Segato, “The Colour-Blind Subject of Myth; or, Where to Find Africa in the Nation,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 27 (1998); Fry, *Para Inglês Ver : Identidade E Política Na Cultura Brasileira*.

²⁹ Stam, *Tropical Multiculturalism : A Comparative History of Race in Brazilian Cinema and Culture*.

about quilombos, historical and contemporary; one was a 1996 television miniseries about the largest quilombo in Latin American history, Palmares. When I finally tracked down Vladimir Carvalho, the maker of a little discussed short documentary from 1975, he agreed to screen the film, *Quilombo* (which conspicuously bears the same title as Carlos Diegues' classic 1984 "black saga" that had been distributed in the United States by New Yorker Films). But Carvalho warned me that it was probably not what I was looking for. I wouldn't really find any Afro-Brazilian culture in his film, he said. "It is about a contemporary quilombo, not a historical one, and the people of this village, called *Mesquita*, well, they're devout Catholics, not practitioners of candomblé."³⁰ A review in a Brasília newspaper from 1976 seemed to have the same concern, advising its readership, "In Vladimir's film these mestizos of today dedicate themselves to subsistence labor and to the annual production of quince marmalade. There are no stronger vestiges of black culture [in the film], being that almost everyone is a practicing catholic..."³¹ And indeed, Vladimir Carvalho and the film reviewer were right. *Quilombo* seemed to have so little to do with race, racism, and blackness that one might wonder why he had even called the film *Quilombo*.

Vladimir Carvalho is a filmmaker in the documentary tradition established by the Paraíba reporter, Linduarte Noronha. Noronha's 1960 short film, *Aruanda*,³² would later be considered by scholars the film that "sparked the Cinema Novo movement."³³ Carvalho had been one of the scriptwriters and assistant directors on the project.³⁴ *Aruanda* is about Olho D'água, a modern day quilombo. The quilombo of Olho D'água is located in the arid region of the state of Paraíba. Its residents live by cotton growing, and the production and sale of ceramic housewares. While *Aruanda* was misunderstood at the time of its exhibition--

³⁰ Personal interview

³¹ Lux-Journal-Brasília, May 23, 1976: 24.

³² For readings of *Aruanda*, see Paulo Antonio Paranaguá and José Carlos Avellar, *Cine Documental En América Latina*, 1. ed. (Madrid: Cátedra, 2003); Leal, *O Discurso Cinematográfico Dos Paraibanos, Ou, a História Do Cinema Da/Na Paraíba*; Glauber Rocha, "Documentários: *Arraial Do Cabo E Aruanda*," *Suplemento Literário do Jornal do Brasil* 1960; Carmen and Caputo Moretzsohn, Gioconda, ed., *Vladimir 70: Mostra Retrospectiva Em Homenagem Aos 70 Anos Do Cineasta Vladimir Carvalho* (Brasília: Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, 2005); Randal Johnson, "Documentary Discourses and National Identity: Humberto Mauro's Brazilian Series and Linduarte Noronha's *Aruanda*," *Nuevo Texto Crítico* XI 21/22 (1998).

³³ Johnson, "Documentary Discourses and National Identity: Humberto Mauro's Brazilian Series and Linduarte Noronha's *Aruanda*," 194.

³⁴For the controversy over the film's authorship, see Oliveira, *Dos Homens E Das Pedras : O Ciclo Do Cinema Documentário Paraibano, 1959-1979*. Although Linduarte only credited Carvalho and Joao Ramiro Mello with being assistant directors on *Aruanda*, both Carvalho and Ramiro Mello have publicly said that the three men co-wrote the script. The script, according to Ramiro Mello, was not even remotely based on Linduarte's 1958 newspaper article about Serra do Talhado (this was Linduarte's argument). Instead, the three men collaborated on the final script after filming. This authorship controversy spelled a break in the Linduarte-Carvalho friendship. The two men reconciled in 1979 (Oliviera 75-6).

by some who complained bitterly that Brazilian cinema should depict something other than misery and by others who were fascinated by the film's ethnographic qualities--, it perfectly encapsulated what would be the objectives of Cinema Novo.³⁵ Funded meagerly by several governmental cultural entities including the *Instituto Nacional de Cinema Educativo* (INCE) and the *Instituto Joaquim Nabuco de Pesquisas Sociais* in Recife, Pernambuco,³⁶ *Aruanda* followed Glauber Rocha's prescription for Cinema Novo: that the underdevelopment of the subject of representation should be matched by the underdevelopment of the means of production. What mattered in this artisanal model of filmmaking was not imitating the high quality image of industrial production, but embracing the democratic potential of relying on nothing but "a camera in the hand and an idea in the head," as Rocha used to say. The search for reality would lead the Cinema Novo filmmakers to the interior of Brazil in search of national typicality and authenticity, far from the immigrant havens of the coast.³⁷

Vladimir Carvalho, himself born in Paraíba, has spent his life elaborating this realist tendency in Brazilian documentary. Fifteen years after *Aruanda*, Carvalho revisited the subject matter of Noronha's film, a contemporary quilombo, in the 1975 short documentary film, *Quilombo* (1975), about a quilombo on the outskirts of the futuristic city of Brasília that had survived for generations primarily from the production of quince marmalade. While it was not his best or most acclaimed work, the film was a continuation of the documentary project he and Noronha had begun in 1960. For like *Aruanda*, *Quilombo* investigates artisanal work process—this time the making of quince marmalade—and it revisits the modern day "quilombo."

The quilombos of Noronha and Carvalho are not the ideal societies of Nascimento or Carlos Diegues. Noronha and Carvalho's films do not posit a discrete and distinctly Afro-Brazilian culture for these quilombos. In other words, while the films do not exactly elide blackness or race, they do not link blackness

³⁵Jean Claude Bernardet, *Brasil Em Tempo De Cinema : Ensaio Sobre O Cinema Brasileiro*, Coleção Cinema, 2. ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Paz e Terra, 1977) 21.

³⁶Glauber Rocha, *Revisão Crítica Do Cinema Brasileiro*, [New ed. (São Paulo, SP: Cosac & Naify, 2003) 144.

³⁷ There is a distinction to be made between the Paraíba school of documentary filmmaking and Cinema Novo, though there is certainly overlap. And we should perhaps remember that these descriptive labels are for the most part imposed after the fact and usually by critics; they are not self-imposed tags. The Paraíba school was situated in Paraíba and emerged with the *Aruanda* project in the late 1950s. It included filmmakers from Paraíba who had been involved in the 50s with the Catholic-sponsored Cineclubes of João Pessoa and with the Faculty of Philosophy at the newly created Federal University of Paraíba. These filmmakers included Linduarte Noronha, Vladimir Carvalho, João Ramiro Mello (*Romeiros da Guia*, 1962), Rucker Vieira (*A Cabra na Região Semi-Árida*), and Ipojuca Pontes (*Os Homens do Caranguejo*, 1969). For more on the beginnings of Paraíba school, see Oliveira, *Dos Homens E Das Pedras : O Círculo Do Cinema Documentário Paraibano, 1959-1979*.

with Afro-Brazilian culture. In fact, these films scrupulously delink race and a black cultural identity. Yet their films recuperate something from these communities. What they recover is an unalienated form of labor. From today's vantage point, *Aruanda* and *Quilombo* may be seen as unwittingly taking a position against the coming culturalist treatments of the quilombo in which the utopian element is an authentic Brazilian culture. By eschewing an interest in cultural rituals and practices, *Aruanda* and *Quilombo* offer a very different account of the symbolic significance of the quilombo.

IV

Aruanda is divided into two parts: the first part is a re-enactment of the mid-nineteenth century journey made by the former slave Zé Bento and his family from a slave plantation to Serra do Talhado, where they establish a homestead. The second part of the film depicts present day Serra do Talhado. After emancipation several former slaves resettle in the Serra do Talhado in what the film calls a “quilombo.” The inhabitants survive by harvesting cotton and by making ceramic housewares which are sold at the local marketplace. The second part of the twenty-minute film focuses on the production of ceramic housewares and on the daylong journey to the marketplace where they are sold. Throughout the film, a sociological voice-of-God narration accompanies the visual track, providing context and sparse analysis to accompany the images.

But the film presents us with a puzzle, which is perfectly expressed in its title. The film, *Aruanda*, was named after a song by Carlos Lyra and Vinicius de Moraes from the early 1960s:³⁸ “ [Go, go, go to Aruanda]/[There, there is no more sadness]/[Go. Everything is beautiful there]/[Listen to that voice that calls you].” “Aruanda” is a word derived from Bantu that means roughly paradise or promised land. The word comes from “A Luanda,” which is the capital of Angola, named so in the 16th century. For the descendents of slaves in Brazil it came to stand in for all of Africa and was thought of as a utopia of well-being and freedom.³⁹ The meaning of *Aruanda*'s title, captured in the song by Carlos Lyra, raises the question: To what does the film's title refer? Is the quilombo of Olho D'agua a kind of promised land? But how could

³⁸ Bernardet, *Brasil Em Tempo De Cinema : Ensaio Sobre O Cinema Brasileiro* 20.

³⁹ Nei Lopes, *Novo Dicionário Banto Do Brasil : Contendo Mais De 250 Propostas Etimológicas Acolhidas Pelo Dicionário Houaiss* (Rio de Janeiro: Pallas, 2003) 32.

it be? The voice-of-god narration tells us that Olho D'agua is in fact no paradise, that its inhabitants live a life of servitude, isolation, and scarcity. The film's opening titles report that after emancipation Olho D'agua, "...was transformed into a peaceful quilombo, isolated from the country's institutions, lost in the hills of the Northeast's plateau, with a small population caught in a tragic, dead-end economic cycle, alternating between cotton harvesting and ceramic production." This might lead one to think that the title is ironic, that although Zé Bento left the plantation in search of "Aruanda"—the promised land—he only found more misery and hardship. The problem with this solution to the puzzle is that what we *see* of Olho D'agua is not primarily misery. The film does not focus on poverty, hunger, etc., but on a process of production.

Indeed, the film's greatest accomplishment to my mind is the detailed visual account of the artisanal mode of producing ceramic housewares. While the film depicts other kinds of making and working—Zé Bento's construction of his home from mud and sticks, the couple's planting of cotton in desiccated soil—it is the pottery sequence of eight minutes (of a total of 20) that is most complete. The film, which almost like a training film, portrays the necessary steps in order: the gathering of dry clay pebbles, the pounding of this hard clumpy soil into a more refined form, the fetching of water from the well, the mixing of the water and the dry land, the kneading of the mud into clay, the hollowing of the clay, the smoothing of the jug's outer edge, the construction of the lip from coils of clay, the decorative pinches in the lip, the patient trimming and smoothing, the baking, the loading (onto donkeys), the walk to market. The film's attentiveness to the process, as if instructing the viewer in how to reproduce it, distinguishes it from just any depiction of work. The sequence says not so much, "Look, *they* work. They make pottery," but rather "Look how pottery is made." It films the process subjectively, from the perspective of a maker, of one who knows the craft from within and who is trying to communicate it to a layman.

A twenty-nine-shot fragment of the sequence made to look like a lesson in the construction of a single jug from beginning to end is perhaps most illustrative of this. In the middle of the sequence the shots are high angle medium shots, and because they are joined by a series of form cuts, the jug is consistently on the left side of the frame, allowing the viewer to easily assess progress from the previous shot. In each shot the camera focuses on the resolute activity of autonomous and nimble hands as they work methodically and

systematically across the surface of the clay—patting, trimming, pinching. The beams of natural sunlight unevenly illuminate the object being formed, as the hands in motion cast dancing shadows on the jug. *Aruanda's* visual account of the making of pottery is beautiful, not miserable. But what makes these images beautiful is not only the composition of shots, which is nice, or the play of shadows and light, which is striking, or the attractiveness of the figures at work. The camera does not ignore the workers themselves, but the object of its fascination is not how they look (unremarkable), or what they wear (plain light dresses), but rather, with what they make and how they make it. I can think of no more precise illustration of the half-artistic nature of handicraft production (figure 5).⁴⁰

⁴⁰ In the August 6th 1960 article in which Glauber Rocha embraced *Aruanda*, he simultaneously praised another film released the same year, *Arraial do Cabo* (Paulo César Saraceni, 1960). Both films were inaugurating a new Brazilian cinema tradition. *Arraial do Cabo* is a beautiful, lyrical film about fishermen fishing. Although its narrative arc follows activities of fisherman at work, depicting their chores in sequential order, still, the approach to work is not like *Aruanda's*. It is surely a film about work, but it does not communicate this same sense of the creative and utopian character of work in a properly organized society. *Arraial do Cabo* is thereby a counterpoint to the aesthetic of labor I have been trying to describe, but one that comes close enough so that the subtle differences can be appreciated. For a short discussion of *Arraial do Cabo's* domestic and international reception, see Rocha, Revisão Crítica Do Cinema Brasileiro; Rocha, "Documentários: *Arraial Do Cabo* E *Aruanda*." Another crude counterpoint may be seen the recent quilombo documentary, *Quilombo Country* (Leonard Abrams, 2006). See footnote 52.



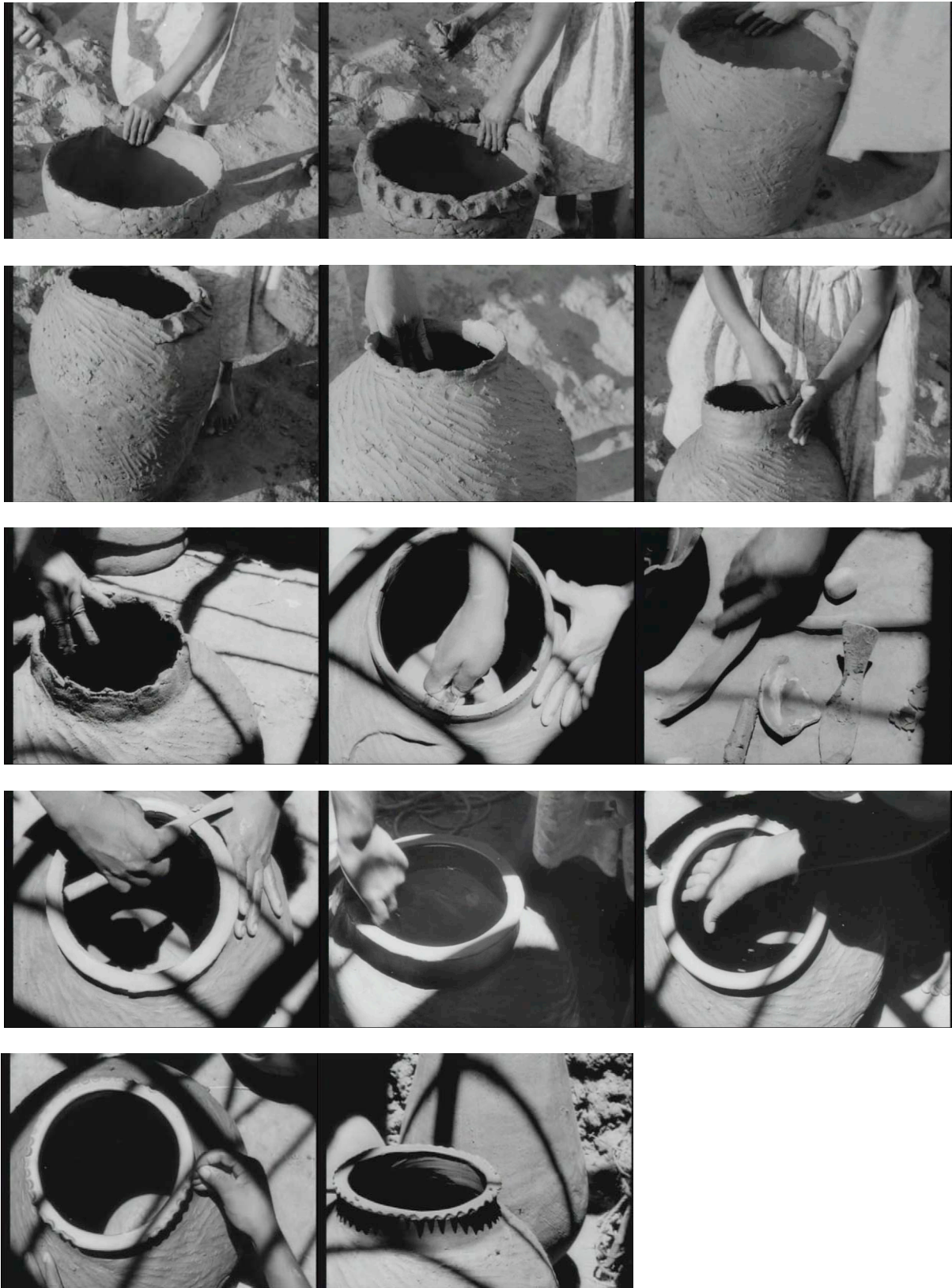


Figure 5. Twenty-nine shot fragment from ceramic sequence. *Aruanda* (Noronha, 1960)

Of course the aestheticization of work has its political dangers. While the film may escape the problems associated with folkloric treatments of the quilombo, it locates itself within another politically precarious tradition, that of the ethnographic film. After all, it depicts a rural black community using “primitive” tools and struggling for survival in an inhospitable environment. Glauber Rocha’s own article on *Aruanda* from 1960 confirms our discomfort: he wrote of the Quilombo da Talhado as represented in *Aruanda*, “It is a civilization in the age of clay, 1000 years behind in development.”⁴¹ And if watching *Aruanda* reminds one of the work of Robert Flaherty,⁴² this is no coincidence. Both Noronha and Carvalho had seen Flaherty’s work. Vladimir Carvalho has said that it was a screening of Robert Flaherty’s *Man of Aran* during his student days in Recife that made him want to be a documentary filmmaker. Flaherty’s film was for Carvalho “a revelation”: a cinema of non-professional actors, that was not spectacular in the Hollywood sense; a cinema of the camera, in search of reality.⁴³ And yet, unlike Flaherty’s work, which has been criticized from the left for racism and aestheticism, *Aruanda* is a film that emerged out of an explicitly leftist political project and has not yet been subject to such critiques. How can we make sense of the close relation this film bears to Flaherty’s romantic project?⁴⁴ Does it escape the politico-ethical criticisms leveled against Flaherty and ethnographic film more broadly?

Criticisms of Flaherty have taken two related forms. The first argues that Flaherty’s films are ethnographic in the pejorative sense used by Fatimah Tobing Rony.⁴⁵ Rony defines ethnographic film as “the

⁴¹ Rocha, *Revisão Crítica Do Cinema Brasileiro* 145. Translation mine.

⁴² Robert Flaherty is not the only reference point here. Carvalho and Noronha were also versed in the work of Dziga Vertov and the British Documentary School of the 1930s and 40s. After all, Alberto Cavalcanti—who spent 16 years in Britain making documentaries with Grierson’s GPO and later Ealing Films—was Brazilian. He returned to Brazil in 1950 and stayed for a time before returning to Europe to escape political persecution.

⁴³ Vladimir Carvalho, *Cinema Candango : Matéria De Jornal* ([Brasília, Brazil]: Edições Cinememória, 2003).

⁴⁴ In some ways *Man of Aran* stands out within Flaherty’s oeuvre. The Aran islanders were considered by Flaherty to be his people (he was of Irish descent) and not an exotic other like the Inuit or the Pacific islanders. Linduarte’s and Carvalho’s relationship to the people depicted in *Aruanda* is similar—after all, these filmmakers are from Paraíba and were engaged in examining life in Paraíba. They were not exactly outsiders or interlopers to the place or people they were documenting. In light of this subtle distinction, we may ask whether this changes the ethnographic character of the films by Flaherty and Linduarte. In other words, are films ethnographic if the relation between filmmaker and film subject is not exactly one marked by radical difference but by ancestry? Surely there is an element of “othering” in conceiving one’s film subject as one’s forebearers, still isn’t there a qualitative difference here?

⁴⁵ Rony, *The Third Eye : Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle*. For an opposing view, see Jay Ruby, *Picturing Culture : Explorations of Film & Anthropology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000). Ruby argues for a more narrowly defined category of ‘ethnographic film’ free from the pejorative meanings built-in to Rony’s definition. On Rony’s view, no film designated as ethnographic escapes the accusation of being racist: after all “situating indigenous people in a displaced temporal realm” is by

broad and variegated field of cinema which situates indigenous peoples in a displaced temporal realm.”⁴⁶ For Rony, Flaherty practices a kind of “taxidermy” by making that which is dead appear as if it were still alive: in *Nanook of the North* (1922) and *Man of Aran* (1934) this meant reviving subsistence practices that had long been abandoned. Here is where Flaherty’s now notorious practice of staging events like shark hunting—in order to render their essence, he said—comes together with the ethnographic character of his films. The taxidermist avers that he is misunderstood, that he is actually a great humanist, that he has undertaken the task of representing Universal man in the epic struggle with nature. But by positing an “original,” “authentic,” “true” indigenous man frozen in time, taxidermy refuses to acknowledge the dynamism of culture and thus condemns indigenous man to stasis—to the timelessness of objects, not people. The denial of what Johannes Fabian has called coevalness—that is, the shared present of the ethnographer and his “object” of study—is at the heart of ethnography’s history of racism.⁴⁷

The second, related criticism leveled at Flaherty—by no less an admirer than John Grierson—accuses Flaherty of a certain escapist aestheticism that violates his (Grierson’s) understanding of the proper social mission of the documentarist: namely, to come to “grips with the creative job insofar as it concerns society.”⁴⁸ The first and the second criticism come together in a 1934 review of *Man of Aran* by David Schrire, a South African with Trotskyist politics:

Flaherty reveals a joy, unholy pleasure in his subject-matter; he revels in it. And its distinguishing quality is a deliberate turn to the fringe of civilization or to an anthropological present, a present for which the Industrial Revolution need never have taken place; a romanticism and ‘Lo, the Noble Savage!’ pervades the whole, wraps it in the old miasmal mist of irrelevancy and distraction. In Flaherty’s world of the cinema there are no such things as machinery and smoke-grimed factories, hotels and labour-camps, unemployment

definition racist. In Jay Ruby’s understanding, Flaherty’s films would not be considered ‘ethnographic’ because he was not an anthropologist. Only anthropologists can make ethnographic films and not all ethnographic films are racist.

⁴⁶ Rony, *The Third Eye : Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* 8. For an investigation of ethnographic films before Flaherty, see Alison Griffiths, *Wondrous Difference : Cinema, Anthropology, and Turn-of-the-Century Visual Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002).

⁴⁷ Fabian, *Time and the Other : How Anthropology Makes Its Object*.

⁴⁸ Paul Rotha and Jay Ruby, *Robert J. Flaherty, a Biography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983) 155.

and hunger, tenement-houses and mansions. But the primitive Eskimos, bronzed Polynesians, virgin snows and coconut trees, surf and elemental storms are the normal material for his celluloid....And it is not as if he is a sensitive soul who cannot bear to contemplate the misery and pain of our modern economic life;...It is just that he is a throw-back, an artistic atavism to whose apologia 'I like this idyllicism. It satisfies my artistic conscience,' there is no reply..."⁴⁹

These accusations—of racism, of irrelevance, of aestheticism—are the very evils that Cinema Novo aims to address. Rocha famously begins his manifesto with their repudiation: "[W]hile Latin America laments its general misery, the foreign onlooker cultivates the taste of that misery, not as a tragic symptom, but merely as an esthetic object within his field of interest."⁵⁰ Cinema Novo goes in search of Brazilian reality, of the Brazilian present, aiming to counter this sentimental mode of consuming misery by eschewing high production values and taking a certain objective analytic stance toward misery. And yet *Aruanda*, like Flaherty's *Nanook* and *Man of Aran*, focuses on an isolated peasant community—far from the rapid industrialization of the major metropolises of the coast--struggling to survive in a desiccated and miserable landscape. What did Noronha and Carvalho see in Flaherty that could be recuperated for a left political project?

I think we can find a clue in Siegfried Kracauer's comments on Flaherty: "Flaherty's 'slight narratives' portray or resuscitate modes of existence that obtain among primitive peoples.... Most Flaherty films are expressive of his romantic desire to summon, and preserve for posterity, the purity and 'majesty' of a way of life not yet spoiled by the advance of civilization."⁵¹ Flaherty's films are consistently, persistently, obsessively concerned with man extracting his means of existence from the earth. These are fundamentally films about modes of production. What is striking about the depiction in *Nanook*, *Moana* (1926), *Aran*, etc. is the careful attention to processes of doing and making: *Nanook* building the igloo, hunting the walrus, *Moana's* tattooing and clothing design sequences, *Man of Aran's* potato-growing sequence, the repair of the

⁴⁹ Ibid. 152.

⁵⁰ Rocha, "An Esthetic of Hunger," 59.

⁵¹ Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film : The Redemption of Physical Reality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997) 273-4.

boat, the shark hunting; *Industrial Britain's* pottery and glass blowing sequences, etc. Even in *Industrial Britain* (1933), it is the artisan amid industrial production regimes that is filmed so lovingly.⁵² John Grierson tried to approximate, in words, the special character of Flaherty's approach to artisanal labor:⁵³

He passed from pottery to glass, and from glass to steel, making short studies of English workmen. I saw the material a hundred times, and by the laws of repetition should have been bored with it. But there is this same quality of great craftsmanship in it which makes one see it always with a certain new surprise. A man is making a pot, say. Your ordinary director will describe it; your good director will describe it well. He may even, if good enough, pick out those details of expression and of hands which bring character to the man and beauty to the work. But what will you say if the director beats the potter to his own movements, anticipating each puckering of the brows, each extended gesture of the hands in contemplation, and moves his camera about as though it were the mind and spirit of the

⁵² *Industrial Britain* is an interesting case because it concretizes the link between Flaherty's romanticism and Grierson's propagandistic, pro-industry project. And in fact, in enlisting Flaherty's participation on the project, Grierson was hoping to harness Flaherty's sensibility to his anti-romantic vision: "But how otherwise than by coming to industry, even as it is, and forcing beauty from it, and bringing people to see beauty in it, can one, in turn inspire man to create and find well-being?" (quoted in Guynn 85). William Guynn sums up: "Grierson enticed Flaherty to participate in the EMB mission by suggesting that industrial labor could be visualized as belonging to the tradition of the British craftsman. It was doubtless a challenge to the Flaherty eye to discern in the looming industrial landscape and the monotony of the assembly line vestiges of individual human workmanship." See William Guynn, "The Art of National Projection: Basil Wright's *Song of Ceylon*," *Documenting the Documentary: Close Readings of Documentary Film and Video*, ed. Barry Keith and Sloniewski Grant, Jeannette (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1998). Grierson and Flaherty shared an interest in labor and work—and this interest made Flaherty susceptible to Grierson's arguments. The great films associated with Grierson's leadership at the Empire Marketing Board (EMP) and the General Post Office (GPO)—*Drifters* (Grierson, 1929), *Industrial Britain* (Flaherty et al, 1931), *Song of Ceylon* (Basil Wright, 1934), *Night Mail* (Wright, Watt, Anstey, et al, 1936),—were, after all, films about work made by progressive social democrats (and self-styled socialists): the work of the British herring industry, the work of the British steel and coal industries, the work of Ceylonese tea harvesting, the work of mail distribution. These were also state-funded films meant to promote British industry and commerce. This connection between state funding and 'progressive' films about production has a parallel in the United States with "new deal" documentaries like *Power and the Land* (Joris Ivens, 1940). This link is paradoxical and raises questions such as: 1) When and why (at what stage) do states invest in mode of production films? 2) How do mode of production films engage issues of national identity? 3) How do we explain progressive filmmakers interest in production at certain historical moments and certain geographical locations? 4) What are the ideological conjunctures and contradictions between these filmmakers and their funders? 5) Do mode of production films exist today? Are they being made? Why or why not? What do they look like? For treatments of the British Documentary movement and national cinema and identity, see Guynn, "The Art of National Projection: Basil Wright's *Song of Ceylon*."; Andrew Higson, *Waving the Flag : Constructing a National Cinema in Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995); Kathryn and Dodd Dodd, Philip, "Engendering the Nation: British Documentary Film, 1930-1939," *Dissolving Views: Key Writings on British Cinema*, ed. Andrew Higson (London: Cassell, 1996). For a discussion of Grierson's ideological commitments, see Ian Aitken, *Film and Reform : John Grierson and the Documentary Film Movement*, Cinema and Society (London ; New York: Routledge, 1990).

⁵³ It should be added that there are several ethnographic films that depict subsistence activities, but whose approaches are merely indexical—that is, whose approaches are allusive. An example in the quilombo film genre is Leonard Abrams' recent film *Quilombo Country* (2006). The film begins with a visual account of the steps in making manioc flour and tries to give a similar account of house-building and armadillo-cooking. Although all the steps are "named" and represented in order, the effect is quite different from Flaherty or Carvalho. In my view, it is the equivalent of cinematic 'telling' rather than 'showing.'

man himself? I cannot tell you how it is done, nor could Flaherty. As always in art, to feeling which is fine enough and craft which is practiced enough, these strange other-world abilities are added.⁵⁴

Unlike the ethnographic films of the National Geographic variety, Flaherty's accounts of human activity are not preliminaries to the real fun—the depiction of exotic rituals, religious ceremonies, elaborate music and dance sequences.⁵⁵ As a point of criticism, commentators on *Man of Aran*, have complained about the single-minded focus on productive activity to the exclusion of (non-material) cultural activities. One critic wrote: “Very little is seen of the life of the island itself and nothing of the island customs, traditions and ceremonies.”⁵⁶ Another marveled: “The characters [of *Man of Aran*] were non-existent personalities. One knew that they were human beings because of their form, but nothing more. There was nothing to distinguish them as Aranese, or as members of any nationality. That was what first amazed me.”⁵⁷

What Noronha and Carvalho saw in Flaherty's work, and hoped to recuperate for a left political project, was Flaherty's single-minded focus on artisanal production. For Noronha and Carvalho, Flaherty's account of the primacy of artisanal labor could be recuperated if and to the extent that it could be identified with unalienated labor.

For Marx, the alienation of the worker under capitalism has four aspects. First, the worker is estranged from the product of his labor, which he neither owns nor controls. Second, because the worker is estranged from the product of his labor, he must also be estranged from himself in the act of production. His labor is in a sense forced: “It is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a *means* to satisfy needs external to it. Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labour is shunned like the plague. External labour, labour in which man alienates himself, is a labour of self-sacrifice, of mortification... [T]he external character of labour for the worker appears in the fact that it is not his own, but someone else's, that it does not belong to him, that in it he belongs, not to himself, but to

⁵⁴ Quoted in Christopher Williams and British Film Institute., *Realism and the Cinema : A Reader*, British Film Institute Readers in Film Studies (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul in association with the British Film Institute, 1980) 89.

⁵⁵ Rony, *The Third Eye : Race, Cinema, and Ethnographic Spectacle* 7.

⁵⁶ Ralph Bond quoted in Rotha and Ruby, *Robert J. Flaherty, a Biography* 149.

⁵⁷ Ibid. 150.

another.”⁵⁸ Third, to the extent that life-activity becomes a means to physical existence, man becomes estranged from his species being. According to Marx, “The whole character of a species—its species character—is contained in the character of its life-activity; and free, conscious activity is man’s species character.”⁵⁹ While animal “produces only under the dominion of immediate physical need,...man produces even when he is free from physical need and only truly produces in freedom therefrom.”⁶⁰ When it has become the case that man can only feel content and free in his animal functions—in eating, drinking, procreating, etc.—and not in his human functions, in conscious productive life—he has become estranged from his nature. The fourth aspect of man’s alienation under capitalism is thus the alienation of man from man.⁶¹

By making production central to the film’s structure, *Aruanda* establishes the primacy of work, life-activity, labor. But how does it represent this life-activity? Is it estranged or not? *Aruanda* suggests that the labor it depicts is unalienated labor—labor whose products and whose act of production do not belong to an alien will. Olho D’agua, the narration tells us, “exists physically, but not in the realm of institutions,” suggesting that it is a relatively autonomous community. The residents of Olho D’agua are not selling their labor power for a wage; there is no trace of private property (though there may be personal property) as the film tells us that the residents of Olho D’agua work collectively sharing means of production and that they divide their earnings at market equally among the families. In these ways *Aruanda* tries to establish that Olho D’agua is a precapitalist communistic enclave in Brazil. And there is a long tradition of Brazilian historiography that casts the historical quilombos in just this mold: isolated, autonomous, communistic. Predictably, the depiction of labor establishes that although there may be a gender division of labor—women make the pottery—there is no division of labor in the Marxian sense that work is divided into more and more

⁵⁸Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Robert C. Tucker, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2d ed. (New York: Norton, 1978) 74.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 76.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Interpreters of Marx have argued that the corollary to this state of affairs is the presence of an involuntary division of labor in which work is divided into more and more minute tasks. While a division of labor may be based on sex, or age, or physical strength, as is often the case in so-called primitive communistic societies, the “true” division of labor emerges with the division between mental and material labor. With wage labor comes private property, and with private property comes the involuntary division of labor. Moreover, this view argues that if the authentic division of labor is voluntary as it would be in theory under future socialism, it is not estranged. See Isidor Wallimann, *Estrangement : Marx's Conception of Human Nature and the Division of Labor* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981) 6, 89.

minute tasks. We see the same women involved in every aspect of the production of ceramic housewares. And the depiction of the work process is strikingly one in which work *looks* not so much like a means to an end—the market, survival—as an end in itself. *Aruanda* makes the work process look like an artistic process, thereby reproducing viscerally for the viewer the subjective experience of unalienated artisanal labor.

But to the extent that the film suggests that it is the artisanal aspects of this labor that make it unalienated, it risks succumbing to romantic anti-capitalism. This was Flaherty's problem. Romantic anti-capitalism comes in different varieties: there are revolutionary strains exemplified by the early Georg Lukács and Rosa Luxemburg and the conservative strains of John Ruskin and Charles Dickens. But what unites them is the objection to the quantification of life in industrial civilization. According to Michael Löwy, who popularized the term, the romantic anti-capitalist “deplores the decline and disappearance of the old pre-capitalist handicraft—a kind of work in which *creativity* and *imagination* were essential components of labor—they describe and analyze the absolute predominance of mere quantitative production, the domination of dead mechanicism over living people, the stultifying effects of the division of labor, the repulsive (Fourier's term) character of mechanical and lifeless toil, the degradation and de-humanization of the worker.”⁶² For the romantic anti-capitalist, the antithesis of the estranged labor of industrial capitalism is artisanal labor.

For Marx, the matter is somewhat different—the antithesis of estranged labor is unestranged labor, which may have an artisanal character or not. Estrangement in labor is not a function of the “nature” of the work performed, as it is for the romantic anti-capitalist, but of its being coerced by an alien will. In the Marxian view, it is neither the automation of the factory nor other industrial techniques of production that render the labor of workers estranged. After all, the future communist society will embrace automation, the machine, and technological innovation, so long as the division of labor implied by this technical ‘progress’ is voluntary. So, while the medieval craftsman was estranged, the artisan of the primitive communistic society is

⁶² Michael Löwy, “The Romantic and the Marxist Critique of Modern Civilization,” *Theory and Society* 16.6 (1987): 894. “Romantic anti-capitalism” is a phrase first coined by Georg Lukács. For a discussion of the differing strains of romanticism, see also Michael Löwy, “Marxism and Revolutionary Romanticism,” *Telos* 49.Fall (1981). For a discussion of the term's provenance, see Michael Löwy, “Naphta or Settembrini? Lukacs and Romantic Anticapitalism,” *New German Critique* 42 (1987). For a response to Löwy's account of romantic anti-capitalism and Löwy's counter-response, see the first part of G. A. and Watkins Rosso, Daniel P., *Spirits of Fire : English Romantic Writers and Contemporary Historical Methods* (Rutherford [N.J.]: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1990).

not. The medieval craftsman is estranged, despite the fact that his labor is artisanal, because it is subject to an involuntary division of labor.

To the extent that *Aruanda* emphasizes visually the artisanal character of labor free from a refined division of labor, it does indeed manifest a romantic anti-capitalist sensibility. But this sensibility does not ultimately turn out to be nostalgic or romantic, I think. It is tempered by the way in which the film represents the scarcity of Olho D'agua at the level of image and narration. And this is how the first part of the film which emphasizes the scarcity and the dryness of the land and the film's narration may be reconciled with the second part, which emphasizes production. As so many critics have argued, *Aruanda* gives a palpable sense of the dryness of the land and the inhospitality of the environment that underscores the narration's point. Zé Bento picks up a handful of dirt, presumably testing its suitability for planting; no sooner has it left the earth than it is blown away in a cloud of dust. At planting time, the land looks like a sea of discrete dirt-pebbles. Zé Bento and the other residents of the quilombo are in a struggle with nature. Like in Flaherty's *Nanook of the North* and *Man of Aran*, *Aruanda* suggests that the residents of Olho D'agua have not brought nature under their control, thereby showcasing the negative consequences of the minimal development of the forces of production.

We are back to the central puzzle of the film: is Olho D'agua "Aruanda"—i.e. a utopia free of alienation--or is it a dystopia characterized by scarcity? Both the loving representation of unalienated artisanal labor and the uncompromising depiction of a vicious cycle of underdevelopment are reconcilable when we read the film through a traditional Marxist lens.⁶³ In other words, we can save Noronha from the critique leveled against Flaherty by recognizing the revolutionary romantic anti-capitalist impulse in *Aruanda*.

⁶³ It could be interesting to think about Hannah Arendt's account of labor and work in relation to this film. See Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958). In *The Human Condition*, Arendt departs from the Marxian view by distinguishing labor from work and the laborer from the worker: *animal laborans* is the laborer who, like an animal, labors to satisfy basic physical needs; *homo faber* is the maker of durable objects for use not merely for consumption. For Arendt, Marx makes the error of not distinguishing between these two types of activity, of treating all labor as if it were work—that is, as if it belonged to the realm of freedom and fulfillment. Arendt thinks that only the worker, the maker of a 'world', engages in uniquely human activity and achieves freedom and fulfillment. In trying to argue that Marx implicitly operates with the distinction she wishes to make between work and labor, she maps productive and unproductive labor (a distinction Marx does make) onto the distinction between work and labor (87). But this is contradictory considering that for her the laborer includes those who produce consumer goods needed for the maintenance of human life. The exemplar of unproductive labor for Marx is the 'menial servant' who produces nothing, merely contributing to the easy life of his master. Can we really compare the 'menial servant' to the tiller of land—the tiller of land produces something essential for life, meanwhile the 'menial servant' truly produces nothing and his *raison d'être* will pass with a reorganization

According to Marx, although the artisan of the precapitalist communistic society is not estranged, this mode of production is still not ultimately desirable. Any idealization of such a society is nostalgic and utopian. Why? The forces of production of the precapitalist communistic society are so poorly developed that man is subject to the domination of nature.⁶⁴ It follows that industrial development is essential to bring nature under our control and to overcome scarcity. Future communism depends on the stark reduction in necessary labor time that comes with the development of the forces of production.

Aruanda negotiates dialectically, though without synthesis, an almost impossible position. On the one hand, it deplores the quilombo's isolation from state institutions, etc., maintaining a clear position on the irredeemable character of poverty. On the other hand, it valorizes the quilombo's production process for its human dimensions. While the film may be generally for development, its loving treatment of unalienated artisanal labor memorializes the "artisanal mode of production" that industrialization renders obsolete in order to make present the subjective experience of unalienated labor.⁶⁵

of society? Commentators have argued that 1) Arendt's emphasis on durability in the products of labor and work is a false criterion of difference and is merely relative; 2) Arendt's denigration of *animal laborans* as reinscribing an elitist division between manual and mental labor; 3) that even in production for immediate needs, man distinguishes himself from animals in that work processes were prefigured in his imagination. In other words, regarding this last point, while it could seem that the tiller of the land is engaged in some activity analogous to animals, that is a false appearance. For while similar needs are perhaps being met, the activity is constitutively different—it is human activity. For a discussions of Arendt's criticisms of Marx, see Sean Sayers, "Creative Activity and Alienation in Marx and Hegel," *Historical Materialism* 11.1 (2003); W.A. Suchting, "Marx and Hannah Arendt's *the Human Condition*," *Ethics* 73.1 (1962). *Aruanda* is clearly depicting the work of *homo faber* in Arendt's terms. And indeed, it may be easier to convey the realm of freedom and fulfillment in labor by focusing on craft, on *homo faber*. Even for Marx, the most fully realized expression of man's laboring nature is not the tilling of the field but the creation of art. And *Aruanda* suggests just this by making the production of ceramic housewares look like the artistic production that the filmmakers are themselves engaged in. Still, I think there is no reason to think *Aruanda* shares Arendt's distinctions between work and labor. On the contrary, I think the film suggests the ontological unity of all human productive activity and strategically opts to assimilate it (human productive activity)—for reasons having to do with the medium—to craft production.

⁶⁴ Wallimann, *Estrangement: Marx's Conception of Human Nature and the Division of Labor* 120.

⁶⁵ It would be interesting to compare this project to that of *Song of Ceylon* (1934). After all, *Song of Ceylon* shares—perhaps more than any other film associated with the British documentary film movement—Flaherty's lyrical, romantic sensibility. William Guynn has argued that *Song of Ceylon* idealizes Ceylonese life and its labor regimes (which had never included wage-slavery) and uses this idealized representation as an implicit indictment of British industrial society. Its ideological commitments seem contradictory for while it succumbs to Orientalism, it also provides a critique of colonial exploitation (but one that did not at all displease its sponsors—the Ceylon Tea Propaganda Board—who basked in the film's success). See Guynn, "The Art of National Projection: Basil Wright's *Song of Ceylon*." That a critique of colonial exploitation can coincide with exoticism should not come as a surprise, and perhaps suggests not so much a paradox as a constitutive feature of colonial discourse, which has rarely grounded its argument in crude economic terms; instead preferring pretty notions like the "white man's burden" and religious salvation. Think Las Casas, for example. Certainly, *Aruanda* is navigating this terrain, but I would argue that the specificity of its idealization (e.g. the singular focus on unalienated labor) goes some way toward saving it from a critique similar to Guynn's critique of *Song of Ceylon*. Wright's film includes several elements missing from *Aruanda*, including the filming of Ceylonese customs and religious practices. Still, we have seen that the singular focus on labor did not save Flaherty. *Aruanda's* redemption is to be found in its refusal to reject the salutary possibilities of development and change.

But there is something else. In its representation of craft, the film establishes an unmistakable parallel between the mode of production of the Olho D'agua potters and the mode of production that produced the film *Aruanda*: both are artisanal. An "artisanal mode of filmic production" is one marked by a non-hierarchical, collaborative, undifferentiated division of labor.⁶⁶ And this was an explicit objective of Latin America's political cinema movements of the 60s and 70s, including Cinema Novo.

There is another sense in which the *Aruanda* analogizes the work of its subjects to the work of its cineastes. In treating the labor of the Olho D'Agua potters as art, *Aruanda's* filmmakers thereby cast their own artistic activity as labor. The film suggests the unity between the artistic labor of the filmmakers and the subsistence labor of the potters: they exist on a continuum of creative human activity and do not exemplify the false opposition between manual and intellectual labor. This is a very Marxian argument. For Marx, humans distinguish themselves from animals by their productive activity. All human productive activity bears the mark of human creative capacity. Art is the highest form of productive activity—that is, of labor.⁶⁷ In exploring the place of aesthetics in Marx's thought, William Adams has noted Marx's use of the "aesthetic dimension as the key to imagining what a non-alienated world would look like. It seems that it would look very much like some combination of artistic craft and aesthetic contemplation."⁶⁸ Adams continues, "A truly liberated society would be one in which work, no longer governed by the imperatives of exchange value, would become something close to art, modeled after the process of artistic expression and the artist's relation

⁶⁶ See Burton, "Film Artisans and Film Industries in Latin America, 1956-1980: Theoretical and Critical Implications of Variations in Modes of Filmic Production and Consumption."

⁶⁷ Sayers, "Creative Activity and Alienation in Marx and Hegel." For more on Marx, work, and human nature, see Sean Sayers, *Marxism and Human Nature*, Routledge Studies in Social and Political Thought (New York: Routledge, 1998); Sean Sayers, "Why Work? Marx and Human Nature," *Society & Society* 69.4 (2005); William Adams, "Aesthetics: Liberating the Senses," *The Cambridge Companion to Marx*, ed. Terrell Carver (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Sean Sayers, "The Concept of Labor: Marx and His Critics," *Society & Society* 71.4 (2007).

⁶⁸ Adams, "Aesthetics: Liberating the Senses," 252. Sayers, who has written about similar issues, disagrees with Adams on this point. Sayers argues that there is nothing romantic in Marx and that "Marx completely rejects the craft ideal" (449) implied in Adams' article. On this question of the craft ideal, he cites Marx's line about "craft idiocy" from *The Poverty of Philosophy* (1847): "The automatic workshop wipes out specialists and craft-idiocy." In the section in question, Marx is discussing Proudhon's romantic criticisms of industrial society. Proudhon is concerned about the rarified division of labor in industrial society and, in the function of this critique, Proudhon idealizes the journeyman of the Middle Ages. Marx is targeting craft-idiocy within feudal society, which tends toward a certain onesidedness, and is not commenting on craft in precapitalist societies. There are other problems that I have discussed above with the model of handicraft production in precapitalist, non-exploitative societies. The fundamental issue here is the relation between art and handicraft. While Sayers wishes to make a sharp distinction—to celebrate the one and denigrate the other—Adams evokes a certain continuity between the two by referring to "artistic craft." This is what Sayers is objecting to. But he has not convinced me that Marx makes as sharp a distinction as he does. His example from *The Poverty of Philosophy* is easily dismissed as Marx's critique of craft within feudal society and not craft as such. See Sayers, "The Concept of Labor: Marx and His Critics,"; Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy*, Great Books in Philosophy (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1995).

to his or her craft and product.”⁶⁹ This is the strategy adopted in *Aruanda*. The film’s recognition of craft as art is perhaps most explicitly achieved in the image of upside down drying ceramic jugs and bowls. They have been placed in such a way that they cease to look like what they are and instead look like an abstract arrangement of giant eggshells (figure 6).⁷⁰



Figure 6. Drying Ceramics. *Aruanda* (Noronha, 1960)

That *Aruanda* is engaged in the aestheticization of labor is undeniable. What I have tried to elaborate is how this aestheticization could have served a left political project. What I think *Aruanda* tries to recuperate for a future time is the ideal character, not of primitive communism, but of an unalienated life-activity—an unalienated way of making, working, producing—that has coincided with primitive communism. Löwy has

⁶⁹ Adams, "Aesthetics: Liberating the Senses," 270.

⁷⁰ Kracauer would perhaps consider this effect to be a function of film’s revealing capacities. See Kracauer, Theory of Film : The Redemption of Physical Reality.

expressed this delicate stance in the Marxism tradition elegantly: “The Romantic dimension has also to a large extent shaped its [the Marxist] vision of the socialist future, presented by the more radical and imaginative Marxist thinkers not only as an economic system where the property of the means of production will be collective, but also as a new way of life, where labor would become (again) like art—this is, the free expression of human creativity.”⁷¹ But in order to make artisanal labor (what *Aruanda* actually depicts) line up neatly with unalienated labor, the film must credibly establish Olho D’Agua’s mode of production as precapitalist communistic. By this I mean that Olho D’agua must appear to be relatively isolated (though for purely historical reasons) from the rest of Brazil. Whether this was actually true of Olho D’agua I do not know. And while Noronha perhaps escapes the charge that his film is nostalgic in the Flaherty style, his insistence on the isolation of *Aruanda* will raise a question about whether the film recuperates unalienated labor at the expense of denying the community “co-evalness.” In other words, the representation of an autonomous and isolated Olho D’Agua (which may serve a poetic-ideological function) effectively situates the actual Olho D’Agua community in a place and time outside of Noronha’s contemporary Brazil. Vladimir Carvalho, in subsequent films about work, will relocate communities like Olho D’Agua within contemporary Brazil, showing them to be geographically contiguous, temporally simultaneous, and thus inextricably connected to centers of state power.

V

While Noronha only made two more films after *Aruanda*, the tradition established by that film was most faithfully elaborated in the films Vladimir Carvalho made in the 20-year period following its release.⁷² Carvalho’s oeuvre is a strikingly consistent body of work about work. It can, however, be divided into three phases. The first phase includes films shot in the northeast of Brazil (mostly in the state of Paraíba), often about production processes—e.g. the making of rapadura (raw brown sugar), the mining of scheelite (an ore

⁷¹ Löwy, “The Romantic and the Marxist Critique of Modern Civilization,” 903.

⁷² Noronha’s following documentary, *O Cajueiro* [The Northeastern Cashew Tree, 1969], as we can perhaps perceive from its title does not focus on labor and production with the same stubbornness as Carvalho’s films. Noronha also made a feature film, *O Salário da Morte* [Death’s Pay Roll, 1971], about a criminal gang in the city of Pombal in Northeastern, Brazil.

of tungsten), and the growing of cotton. In 1969, drawn by employment and seduced by the contradictions of the recently built futuristic capital of Brazil, Carvalho relocated to Brasília. In this second phase, the Brasiliense period, Carvalho investigated the painful ironies surrounding that ambitious construction project. And in the third phase, the “return to origins” phase, Carvalho turns to cultural production and memory.

Quilombo (1975) is officially part of Carvalho’s Brasiliense phase: after all, it follows the subsistence activities of a quilombo community on the periphery of Brasília. It is the second film of a trilogy that includes *Vila Boa de Goyaz* (1974) and *Mutirão* (1976). In many ways, though, it is more closely aligned with the films of the first *nordestina* phase.⁷³ The most significant films of this phase include *A Bolandeira* (1967), which was awarded the best film prize by the Cinema Club of Brasília during the Festival of Brasília in 1969; *A Pedra da Riqueza* (1975), which won the Margarida de Prata prize;⁷⁴ *O País de São Saruê* (1970), which was censored for nine years before finally being released in 1979. The first two were filmed during the period that Carvalho was collecting materials for *O País de São Saruê*. The footage was shot in the same region and resulted from daytrip detours. I would like to discuss a few films of the *nordestina* phase in order to establish the context out of which *Quilombo* emerges. *A Bolandeira* is perhaps most closely related to *Quilombo* in that its ostensible topic, the sugar-grinding device called “bolandeira” in Portuguese, prominently present in *Quilombo*. It is also the Carvalho film that figures most visibly today as the result of a recent homage by Walter Salles (figure 7).⁷⁵ I will therefore dedicate the most space to its analysis.⁷⁶

⁷³ Sérgio Moriconi, “O Real Desencantado Em Vladimir Carvalho,” *Vladimir 70: Mostra Retrospectiva Em Homenagem Aos 70 Anos Do Cineasta Vladimir Carvalho*, ed. Carmen and Caputo Moretzsohn, Gioconda (Brasília: Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, 2005). Moriconi, the curator of a 2005 Carvalho retrospective, distinguishes three phases in Carvalho’s oeuvre: the *nordestina* phase, the *brasiliense* phase, and the ‘volta as origens’ or ‘return to origins’ phase.

⁷⁴ This is a prize granted by the Conferencia nacional dos Bispos do Brasil (CNBB).

⁷⁵ In 2003, Walter Salles—the director of such recent domestic and international successes as *Central Station* (1998) and *The Motorcycle Diaries* (2004)—released his third film set in the *sertão* of northeastern Brazil. Adapted from a novel by the Albanian author Ismail Kadare and set in the dry Brazilian northeast circa 1910, *Abril Despedaçado* [Behind the Sun] is about a feud between two families that leads to the death of two sons and the migration of another from the interior to coast.⁷⁵ Perhaps more than any other commercial Latin American filmmaker, Salles has stubbornly devoted himself to reviving the Latin American political cinema tradition of the 1960s and 70s. *Abril Despedaçado* is no exception. It opens with an explicit homage to the little remembered short film by Vladimir Carvalho, *A Bolandeira*. Salles’ homage, which was photographed by Carvalho’s brother, Walter, has little to do with Vladimir Carvalho’s short at a conceptual or thematic level. It borrows only the visual trope of the outmoded bolandeira (and Carvalho’s political credentials) that in *Abril Despedaçado* is a synecdoche for the backwardness of *sertão* society with its family feuds, its strict codes of honor, and its dense machismo. Of course, the filming of the actual bolandeira in the ravishing credit sequence of *Abril Despedaçado* helps to imbue this regressive society with a certain formal beauty. But the film is marred by an inarticulate nostalgic gaze. Perhaps Salles believed that he was doing more than appropriating a visual trope, and folklorizing it. Perhaps he thought that he was reclaiming the contradictory essence of the Carvalho documentary project, that he was conjoining, as Carvalho had, the beauty and misery of the northeastern *sertão*, in a troubled union. And perhaps he thought that he was reopening a conversation about that



Figure 7. Bolandeira at Work. (Left) still from *A Bolandeira* (Vladimir Carvalho, 1967). (Right) still from *Abril Despedaçado* [*Behind the Sun*] (Walter Salles, 2003)

A Bolandeira is a 10-minute film centered on a primitive machine (with the same name) powered at different historical moments in different geographic settings variably by water, slaves, or oxen (figure 3). For hundreds of years, the bolandeira has been used in the refining of sugar in northeastern Brazil. The first few minutes of *A Bolandeira* provide a semi-official back-story. A voice of god narrator reports the facts of the bolandeira's past. The official narration is accompanied by a modernist musical score that rhythmically links the sound track to a series of still images of 17th and 19th century engravings and paintings of Brazilian sugar

Marxist humanist vision. But the aestheticization of the miserable is dangerous ground, as we said before. And anyway, Salles' homage is not really in dialogue with Carvalho's film. Perhaps this final line presupposes a controversial understanding of the homage as "faithful" reference, as a means to capture something essential about the original, rather than as a creative transformation of the original. But in the case of Salles, I really think that this homage to Carvalho is shallow—not a creative transformation at all, not a transformation that wrestles with the original. I think it violates the spirit of Carvalho's investigation of the bolandeira, instead reverting to a stereotypical, mundane, and stagist (as in, merely a symbol of an archaic Brazilian feudalism) interpretation of the bolandeira—an interpretation that Carvalho's film contests. I suppose that the violation of the spirit of the film that is being 'homaged' could be interesting and a valid intervention, but in Salles' case, I think it is just vacuous.

⁷⁶ Recently scholars have interpreted the resurgence of Brazilian films set in the *sertão* in the 1990s (part of the 'Retomada' or Revival of Brazilian cinema) as a return to the engaged cinema of Cinema Novo's first phase. Examples include *Corisco e Dadá* (Cariry, 1996), *Baile Perfumado* (Caldas and Ferriera, 1997), *Crede-mi* (Lessa and Roland, 1997), *Sertão das memórias* (José Araújo, 1997), *O Cangaceiro* (Massaini Neto, 1997), *Central Station* (Walter Salles, 1998), *Me You Them* (Andrucha Waddington, 2000). See Nagib, *The New Brazilian Cinema*. Cinema Novo's early history of exploring the northeastern *sertão* has been frequently discussed by scholars. The three most important films of the Cinema Novo movement are set in the *sertão*: *Vidas Secas* (Nelson Pereira dos Santos, 1963), *Deus e o diabo na terra do sol* (Rocha, 1964), *Os Fuzis* (Ruy Guerra, 1964). But even the political impetus for Cinema Novo's attraction to the northeast is ambiguous. And in fact, filmic interest in the northeast predates Cinema Novo. Célia Ferreira Tolentino argues that in the 1950s (in films like *O Cangaceiro* [Lima Barreto, 1953] and *Jeca Tatú* [Mazzaropi, 1959]) the northeast symbolized paradoxically both "the other" and the "maximum synonym of Brasilidade" (23); it represented a perhaps authentic past that had been superseded by rapid industrialization and urbanization, but that could be embraced as a kind of colorful patrimony. Meanwhile, for the Cinema Novo directors, the northeast also symbolized the 'real Brazil' but rather than seeing it as part of a past that had already been overcome, these directors saw it as a part of the ugly present—poor, backward, and lacking modernization—begging for redress. "It was an 'other' to be rescued in the establishment of a new nation..." (142). Jean-Claude Bernardet deftly outlines the unanswered questions surrounding Brazilian cinema's fascination with the northeast in his contribution to Wills Leal's *O Nordeste no Cinema*.

mills. There are six different works by artists including the Dutch painter Frans Post (1612-1680) and the German Johann Moritz Rugendas (1802-1858). (figure 8)(figure 9)(figure 10)(figure 11)(figure 12)(figure 13) Carvalho only shows a few of the prints in their entirety, one by Frans Post, “Engenho em Pernambuco” (1647) and one, “A Sugar Mill,” published in *Travels in Brazil* (1816) by the Englishman Henry Koster.⁷⁷



Figure 8. Water-driven Sugar Mill in Pernambuco, Brazil; painting by Frans Post, 1647

⁷⁷ While it is clear that Koster is the author of the travelogue, *Travels in Brazil*, that features the image “A Sugar Mill,” it is unlikely that Koster is the artist.



Figure 9. Casa de Fazenda em Pernambuco. Painting by Frans Post.
Published by Joan Blaeu in Caspar van Baerle's *Rerum per octennium in Brasília et alibi nuper gestarum . . . Historia* (Amsterdam, 1647)

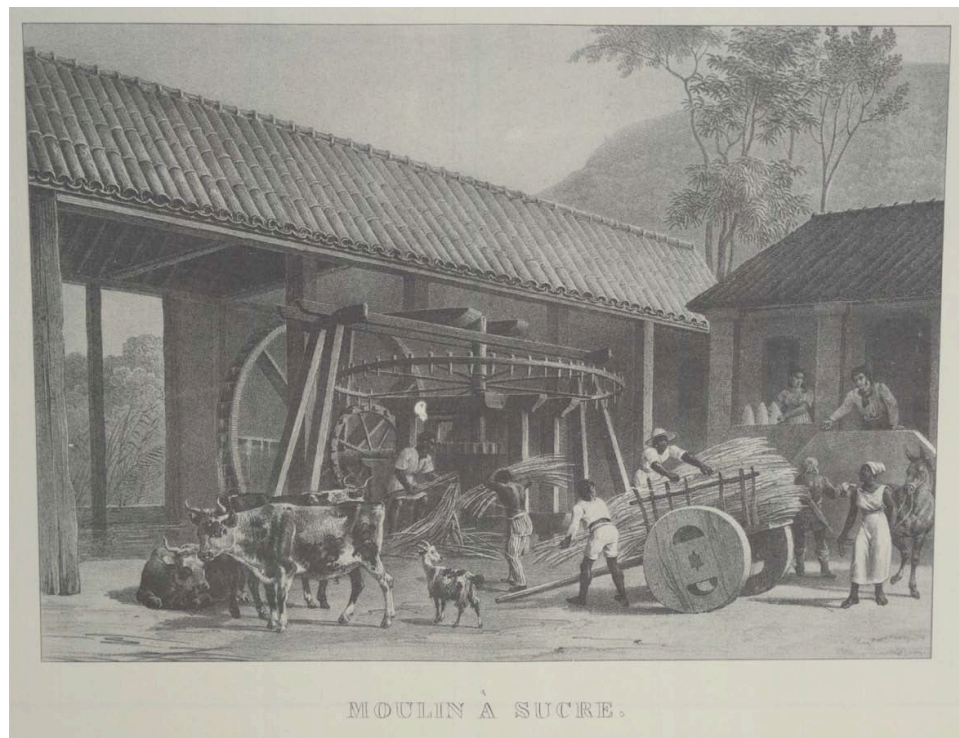


Figure 10. Plantation Mill Yard and Sugar Mill. Watercolor by Johann Moritz Rugendas.
Published in b/w in *Voyage Pittoresque dans le Bresil* (Paris, 1835); Reprinted in *Viagem Pitoresca Através do Brasil* (Rio de Janeiro, 1972), and in color from original water colors, in *Viagem Pitoresca Através do Brasil* (Editora Itatiaia Limitada, Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 1989)



Figure 11. Sugar Production, Brazil.
Published by Simon de Vries, *Curieuse aenmerckingen der bysonderste Oost en West-Indische verwonderens-waerdige dingen . . .* (Utrecht, 1682)

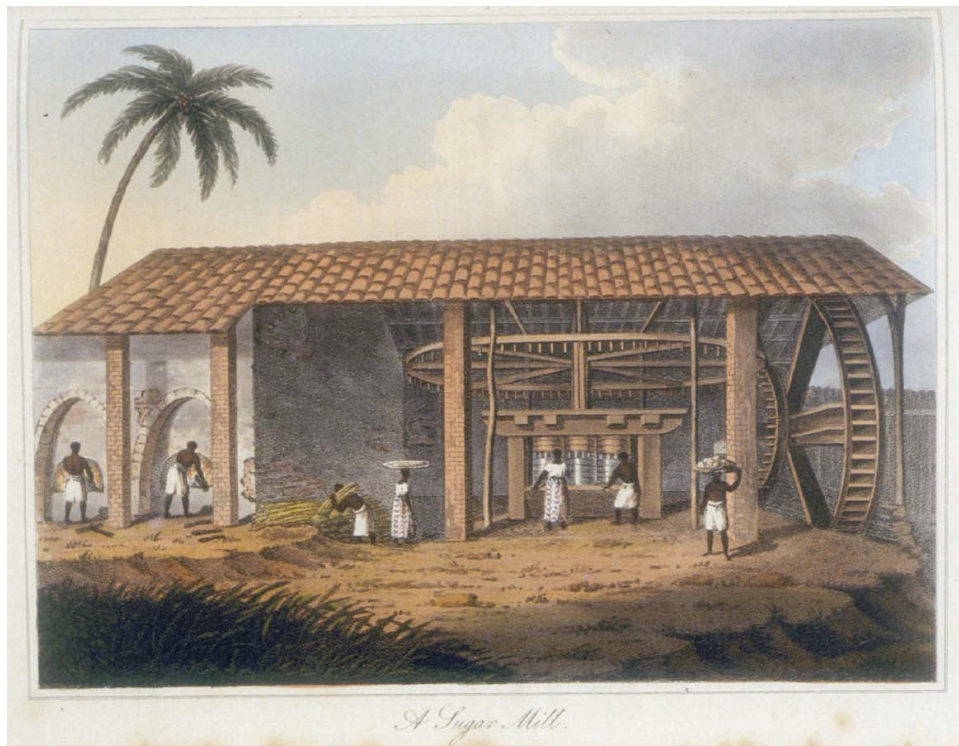


Figure 12. Sugar Mill, Brazil. Sugar Mill, Brazil.
Painting from Henry Koster, *Travels in Brazil* (London, 1816), p. 336.

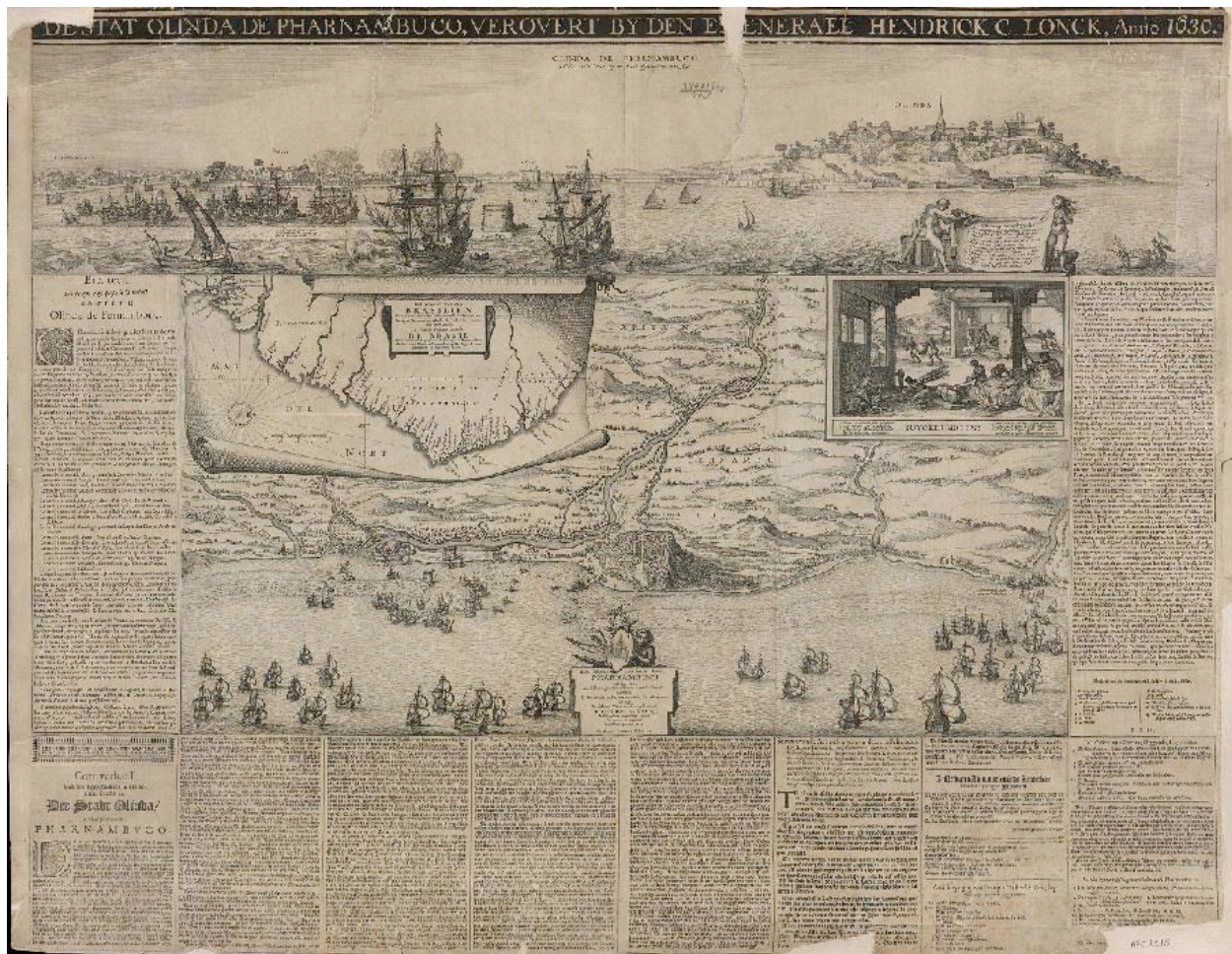


Figure 13. Map of Olinda, Pernambuco.
1630 engraving by Claes Jansz Visscher (a.k.a. Nicolaus Ioannis Piscator)



Figure 14. Sugar Refining Process.
Inset from 1630 engraving by Claes Jansz Visscher (a.k.a. Nicolaus Ioannis Piscator)

In most of the shots, Carvalho pans, zooms, and cuts to close-ups of different regions of the engravings where different activities are depicted. The engraving that opens the film—an inset from a 1630 map of Olinda, Pernambuco made by Claes Jansz Visscher (a.k.a. Nicolaus Ioannis Piscator), a Dutch draughtsman and mapmaker⁷⁸—depicts simultaneously, almost narratively, in a single frame, several necessary activities in the early milling of sugar, each of which is numbered in the original inset (figure 14). Twelve shots, focusing on different scenes of work within the single engraving, reveal the steps in the production process. In the

⁷⁸ *A Bolandeira* only cites three of the artists (Post, Rugendas, and Visscher) in the credits and spells “Visscher” as “Vischer.” That most of these images are made by Dutchmen is not surprising. The Dutch occupied Pernambuco from 1630-1654 and were the first Europeans to adapt eastern techniques in sugar refining.

foreground, slaves boil and skim the cane syrup; on the left, slaves bring cane stalks to the milling hut; in the background a primitive bolandeira, powered by two slaves, crushes cane stalks while another slave collects the syrup in a basin. But we hardly see the whole engraving; we only see its parts, separately conveyed. Carvalho films the engraving as though it were several and not only one. The images are presented to us as a kind of slide show of the discrete scenes of labor set to music and narration. Until now, *A Bolandeira* has looked like a plain historical documentary about the olden days. This impression is broken by the surprise of the repeated presentation of two sections of the Visscher engraving that depict a) slaves powering the bolandeira (rather than water or oxen) and b) a slave collecting the syrup crushed as a result of their effort. These two close-up images (that come from the same engraving) alternate four times, each time accented by the musical track, in a kind of call and response, cause and effect sequence. The implication is that as a result of the slaves' labor, sugar syrup is produced. This is a playful gesture that in effect animates the still image in what could be read as a reference to Vertov. It suggests the all-important fourth dimension (time) missing from this static depiction of labor. Indeed, this bit of expressive editing anticipates the element that the film itself will restore to history telling—namely, time, and what it enables, motion, or in this case, labor. *A Bolandeira*, like *Aruanda*, is another film about labor, this time about the production of an endogenously consumed sugar product, *rapadura*, or raw brown sugar.

After this slideshow introduction, the film begins its documentary depiction of the work of the bolandeira in the contemporary context of Paraíba. As in *Aruanda*, the images that follow are organized around a set of tasks, broken down into component parts and linearly ordered, that will result in a final product—rapadura—that is sold in rectangular blocks on market day. The images of cane-cutting are followed by the transport of the cane to the bolandeira. We see the cane stalks forced by human hands between giant horizontal rollers, propelled by oxen that walk in a perfectly symmetrical circle at a set radius of several feet from the revolving wheels, goaded along by the whip. As the cane stalks are flattened between the giant rollers, cane syrup collects in a bucket while the dry stringy cane stalks pile up near-by, feasted upon by flies whose enhanced buzzing provides the primary musical soundtrack. The cane syrup finds its way indoors where men cook it and stir it until the moisture evaporates and it thickens and crystallizes. They then pour

the mixture into evenly divided rectangular sections of a long block. The blocks are cooked in a wood-burning oven with a long chimney. The now hard, cooled light brown rapadura, removed from its mold, is loaded onto a cart. Piles of rapadura blocks are being sold from a counter at the local market. We see one block being wrapped in newspaper and exchanged for coins. Rapadura—from cane stalk to consumer, just as in *Aruanda* we followed the production of ceramic jugs—from dry dirt pebble to market.

But unlike in *Aruanda* whose narration is entirely authoritative and sociological, in *A Bolandeira* the sociological voice of god narration in the opening and the ending is complemented by the reading of a melancholic poem written by Jomar Morais Souto, also called “A Bolandeira.” The poem accompanies the central and most engaging part of the film, the depiction of the workings of the bolandeira and the making of rapadura.

As in *Aruanda*, *A Bolandeira* works with and through contradiction. In this film, the most obvious contradiction is introduced by Souto’s poem: namely, that the sweetness of sugar is incongruous with the pain and bitterness of the workers who produce it, that sugar properly belongs to a utopian future not to the exploitative present. But we should be clear: the problem is not the difficulty of the labor process, but that the workers are divided from its benefits. That is the paradox pointed out by Souto’s poem. The poem ends with these stanzas: “Amarga mel./ O melado fica no rosto em suor,/ quanto ao doce um gosto alado,/ distante, nao esta em redor./Nao esta na ponta da lingua,/esta num tempo melhor./Um tempo em que, nunca, a mingua,/ morram tanto assim. É só. [Bitter honey/ The sticky residue/ remains on the face stuck in sweat,/ its sweet taste is/ distant, it is not around./ It is not on the tip of the tongue,/ it is in a better time./ A time in which, never, in poverty like this,/will so many die. And alone.]” This conceit depends on the relation between production and consumption, for so long as the pain of production and the delight of consumption belong to two separate realms we are not so struck by the irony of the taste content of sugar. *A Bolandeira*—through its sound and visual track—restores this link.

Another contradiction the film observes is between the ingenuity of the bolandeira as a machine and its role in the exploitation of labor. The film begins with an epigraph from Antonil that suggests the etymology of “bolandeira.” “...roda superior também grande, que chamão volandeira porque o seu modo de

andar circularmente sôbre a moenda, se parece com o voar de hum pássaro quando dá no ar seus rodeios. [...giant wheel, called *volandeira* because of its way of moving circularly around the roller resembles the flight pattern of a bird when it circles (its prey).]”⁷⁹ Why begin *A Bolandeira* with this naturalistic imagery? This organic analogy suggests at once the foreboding, sinister character of the *bolandeira* preying on those that work it and the equilibrium of nature in which the preying bird must nourish itself too. In the epigraph and in Souto’s poem, which compares the treads of the rollers of the *bolandeira* to human teeth, this instrument of production is treated as a sort of living being: it has a mouth, it groans, it can speak. Does it have agency? Is it a victimizer like the preying bird? Is it the cause of the workers suffering, subject as they are to its grueling regime? There is no boss to blame, only the living, groaning *bolandeira*. But the most visually engaging part of the film is the treatment of the *bolandeira* as a mechanical instrument. Like the ceramic sequence of *Aruanda* that instructs the viewer in how jugs are made, the shots of the *bolandeira* at work give a sense of how the machine works. If *Aruanda* concentrates on the effectiveness of the human hand as a tool in the fabrication of objects, *A Bolandeira* turns its attention to the machine as an effective, though contradictory, tool in production. If *Aruanda* focuses on what it construes to be a precapitalist communistic enclave in Brazil, *A Bolandeira* examines production within a capitalistic wage-labor regime.⁸⁰ But *A Bolandeira* does not denigrate the machine, thereby elevating the hand to the noblest of status. Moreover, it tells us that the trouble with the capitalist mode of production is not the machine or what it produces, but rather, unequal social relations of production.

One might wonder why it is that in both *Aruanda* and *A Bolandeira* so much attention is given to the activities of the market: the films themselves end with the end of the cycle of production and exchange (figure 15). Once the Olho D’Água potters have sold their wares at the end of the market day, they load new goods onto a mule and meander home—presumably to begin the cycle anew. In *A Bolandeira*, it is the close-

⁷⁹ André João Antonil, *Cultura E Opulência Do Brasil*, Coleção De Estudos Brasileiros (Bahia, Brasil: Progresso, 1955).

⁸⁰ I suppose that one could argue that Carvalho is actually representing production within a feudalistic arrangement, that what is being criticized is the backwardness of lingering feudalistic labor practices. But I actually think that Carvalho believes (with the ‘dependency school’) that what look like feudal remnants—or underdevelopment—in Brazilian society are actually the form of appearance that capitalism takes in the third world. In other words, Carvalho thought that the solution to underdevelopment was not more capitalism (i.e. that underdevelopment was the result of sectors that had not yet been penetrated by capitalist labor relations), but rather, he thought that development and underdevelopment were both produced by the capitalist world-system.

up image of the wrapped rapadura loaf being exchanged for money at a busy stall that closes the film. In both cases, these artifacts—that could be easily rendered in folkloric terms—are stubbornly refused that storyline; they are not taken out of their proper context within a particular circuit of production *and* distribution *and* exchange. Like the people who fabricated these products—though under differing conditions of exploitation—the goods are in some sense “alive”: they have non-symbolic use value. They are bought and consumed, used for what they were intended and not placed in the corner of a bohemian Manhattan apartment as décor.

This treatment of objects reveals a particular approach to culture, for both films investigate the lives of distinctly local products—ceramic jugs and rapadura. This approach privileges an examination of material culture, suggesting that by tracing the stories of the objects of a culture (here the culture of the northeast)—we can learn something crucial about that culture, its people, and its mode of life. The stance is not so much anti-culturalist as stubbornly materialist in its attitude toward the investigation of culture.



Figure 15. Selling rapadura at market. The last shot of *A Bolandeira* (1967)

By starting from the “beloved element of the sertanejo diet,” rapadura, Carvalho can reveal a whole structure and a long history of Brazilian slavery and exploitation—the story of rapadura requires a look at the bolandeira since only it can produce rapadura, and the bolandeira raises questions about how it has been powered in the past and in the present. That history he shows us is present, congealed in a beloved and very regional product like rapadura. The contradictions and ironies of this state of affairs should not escape us: the well-loved rapadura is an inferior byproduct of sugarcane that has been fabricated for a long time (recently as a result of state neglect of the northeast) with great physical effort by an exploited group of laborers who nonetheless enjoy their rapadura at home. In the context of the Caribbean, Anthropologist Sidney Mintz has commented perceptively on this contradiction:

[T]here are differences between families using ancient wooden machinery and iron cauldrons to boil up a quantity of sugar to sell to their neighbors in picturesque loaves, and the masses man and machinery employed in producing thousands of tons of sugar cane (and, eventually, of sugar) on modern plantations for export elsewhere. Such contrasts are integral features of Caribbean history. They occur not only between islands or between historical periods, but even within single societies (as in the case of Jamaica or Haiti) at the same time. The production of brown sugar in small quantities, remnant of an earlier technical and social era, though it is of declining economic importance will no doubt continue indefinitely, since it has cultural and sentimental meaning, probably for producers as well as consumers. Caribbean sugar industries have changed with the times, and they represent, in their evolution from antecedent forms, interesting stages in the world history of modern society.⁸¹

While not having abandoned a stagist approach to development, Mintz observes that this combined, uneven development—the co-existence of modern plantations that produce and refine sugar and the presence of small rapadura-making operations—assumes a kind of cultural importance for those living its contradictions.

⁸¹ Sidney Wilfred Mintz, Sweetness and Power : The Place of Sugar in Modern History (New York: Penguin Books, 1986) xxii.

The bolandeira of Carvalho's film embodies a mixed heritage. On the one hand, it is an instantiation of real human ingenuity and elegance. On the other hand, it is a comparatively inefficient method that produces a relatively impure, molasses-heavy raw brown sugar. On the one hand, the labor-intensive process in the hands of small producers is done by workers with little hope and few prospects. On the other hand, the result of this production method, rapadura, is an intensely local product; it is an essential and well-loved element of the sertanejo diet and one that encapsulates a regional history.

From a certain vantage point, *A Bolandeira* could seem like another film about a sertão lost in time, with its archaic machines and backwards labor processes. And this is implicitly the reading given it by Salles and by several film critics. Sérgio Moriconi, curator of a 2005 Carvalho retrospective, has written that “O ciclo vicioso da miséria de alguma maneira está metaforizado em *A Bolandeira* [The vicious cycle of misery is somehow metaphorized in *A Bolandeira*]” and that “Engrenagem arcaica, as boladeiras são um símbolo da cultura do atraso e da miséria [Archaic method of refining, boladeiras are a symbol of a culture of underdevelopment and misery.]” But the film's voice of god narrator tells us that “Nas terras secas do oeste da Paraíba ainda hoje, em plena vigência do tecnologia, pode assistir o trabalho obscuro da moenda feito de pau ferro de uma dessas engenhocas de rapadura funcionando como a duzentos anos atrás em espantoso recuo a idade da madeira. [In the dry lands of the west of Paraíba, even today, in the full throttle of technology, you can see the dark work of the grinding equipment made of ironwood of those sugar mills working as they did 200 years ago in the age of wood.]” The continuity of the present bolandeira as it supplies rapadura in small quantities to nearby markets for local consumption coexists with more technologically sophisticated methods for refining sugar in what amounts to an instance of uneven and combined development.⁸² The film thus traces a certain degree of historical development as well as stasis. In

⁸² The law of uneven and combined development was formulated by Leon Trotsky in his effort to understand the peculiarities of the Russian situation. The task was to explain how the productive forces of a society develop once the world market is dominated by imperialist powers. In this account, societies pass through developmental stages according to predictable laws. But once the world market has been consolidated, societies with relatively low development of the forces of production do not pass through the same stages as the imperialist powers did. This idea may be expressed in the oft-quoted line from Trotsky, “Savages throw away their bows and arrows for rifles all at once, without traveling the road which lay between those two weapons in the past.” For a Marxist treatment of the law of uneven and combined development, see George Edward Novack, *Understanding History; Marxist Essays*, [1st ed. (New York,: Pathfinder Press, 1972)].

this sense, rapadura does not merely index a backward pocket of Brazilian sugar production in the midst of being superceded. It evidences a characteristic of the capitalist world-system: the coexistence of the developed and the underdeveloped in the Third World. *A Bolandeira*, unlike *Arunda*, makes clear that the bolandeira exists in the present, alongside more efficient technology. But this embrace of co-evalness, at least at the level of narration if not on the visual plane, renders a complex analysis of the mixed legacy of the bolandeira and not, as one might expect, an unequivocal celebration or a merely dismissive condemnation.

The relation between coevalness and combined and uneven development is made even more explicit in Carvalho's subsequent film, *A Pedra da Riqueza*. He shot the footage for *A Pedra da Riqueza* at the same time and in the same geographic region as *A Bolandeira*. *A Pedra da Riqueza* depicts scheelite-mining in the northeast. This 15-minute short features the non-synchronous voice-over commentary of a miner who we never see clearly enough to identify. As the miner describes the conditions of the mine, the dangers of mining with dynamite, and the precariousness of an existence without safety nets (neither high pay, nor insurance, nor retirement plans, nor disability benefits), the visual track shows the constitutive activities of scheelite mining: digging, dynamiting, carting, sifting, sieving, etc. The atonal, discordant free jazz musical score by Fernando Cerquiera adds a menacing, anticipatory quality reminiscent of horror film. And indeed it is the score that foreshadows the horror of the film's final moments, contrasting eerily with the worker's calm account and with the patient, almost banal editing of the activities of the miners at work. As the film is ending, the interviewer, whose voice we have not heard until now, asks the deceptively simple question: "do you know what the scheelite is for?"⁸³ The worker confesses: he doesn't know what the scheelite is for, no one has told him, he works in the mine but he doesn't know where it goes, he thinks they might send it abroad. The film abruptly ends, an intertitle explaining the scheelite's actual trajectory. "The tungsten extracted from the scheelite is used primarily in the defense industry, in the advanced technologies of the superpowers. Rockets and spaceships are created with this mighty steel alloy tempered to resist fire and

⁸³ Jean-Claude Bernardet has said that this question is the only synchronized sound in the film and that someone asks the question while leaning over the editing table. From what I can tell, this is not true: there are no images of editing tables and all the sound is non-synchronous. The question is asked on the audio track while the miners are shown resting and eating at the end of the day's work. See Jean Claude Bernardet, "The Voice of the Other: Brazilian Documentary in the 1970s," *The Social Documentary in Latin America*, ed. Julianne Burton (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1990).

violent impact.... The mine seen here is one of the many rudimentary extraction sites in the Northeast where the Brazilian reserves lie, perhaps the largest reserves after the mines of mainland China.”⁸⁴ The Brazilian film scholar, Jean-Claude Bernardet, has said that “With this text, the film makes an immense leap: the small suffering work of one man, a miniscule detail, suddenly becomes part of an international system.”⁸⁵ Indeed, the question asked by the interviewer and the intertitle that follows establishes the worker’s alienation on the one hand and interconnectedness of the globalized world-system on the other hand. This worker who seems to live a remote life in the “archaic” Brazilian sertão turns out to play a crucial role in the first world’s highly “developed” space industries. *A Pedra da Riqueza* thereby demonstrates the coevalness of these two worlds and their imbrication in a global system of uneven and combined development.⁸⁶

VI

Quilombo came out the very same year as *A Pedra de Riqueza*, in 1975. Although it was made in Carvalho’s Brasiliense phase, shortly after he had moved to Brasília, it represents the bookend of Carvalho’s cycle of production process films that began with *Aruanda*. That the cycle closes with another film about a quilombo is thus fitting.⁸⁷ How much has Carvalho’s view changed in the intervening years? And how do we account for the centrality of the quilombo community to this cycle of films?

Quilombo depicts the productive activities of Mesquita, a quilombo community located one hour from Brasília, near the city of Luziânia. The community of Mesquita we learn has survived for generations through subsistence agriculture and the production of quince marmalade.

⁸⁴ This translation has been taken from Jean Claude Bernardet’s article, p. 103.

⁸⁵ Bernardet, “The Voice of the Other: Brazilian Documentary in the 1970s,” 103.

⁸⁶ For this reason, Bernardet has praised Carvalho’s achievement in the broader context of Brazilian documentary production: “It is especially relevant to see this [the discrepancy between the miserable northeastern and the final result of his work] particular dimension of labor exploitation in *A Pedra da Riqueza* because it is completely absent from the group of Brazilian documentary films that, frequently, describe the worker’s misery and exploitation at the hands of his immediate boss or overseer, but which never reach the level of international capitalism. This single fact profoundly differentiates Vladimir Carvalho’s film from the general run of Brazilian documentaries” (104). See Ibid.

⁸⁷ Carvalho has ways of linking *Quilombo* to his early collaborations with Linduarte. The community of Mesquita is located in the municipality of Luziania, which used to be called Santa Luzia in the olden days when the ancestors of the Mesquita community were working in its gold mines. Perhaps it is a mere coincidence that *Aruanda*’s potters too sell their wares in the town of Santa Luzia, whose name is prominently scrawled on a wall at the market. Perhaps it is also a coincidence that Carvalho subsequent film, *Mutirão* (which is part of a trilogy with *Quilombo*), is about the efforts of the village of Olhos d’Água (c.f. *Aruanda*’s Olho d’Água) to make a traditional carpet for the local church.

Perhaps the most striking difference between *Aruanda*, *A Bolandeira*, *Pedra da Riqueza* on the one hand and *Quilombo* on the other hand is that while the first three focus exclusively on labor and material culture, *Quilombo*'s final minutes turn to non-material culture. The documentary depicts the “festa do divino” or the feast of the Holy Ghost. This is a Catholic festival brought from Portugal by the colonizers in the 16th century and celebrated today in parts of rural Brazil around Easter time. Although the “festa do divino” has, over the centuries, adapted to Brazilian norms and requirements, and taken on differing regional forms, scholars agree that the festival has its provenance in Portuguese rural society.⁸⁸ By Carvalho including an ethnographic treatment of the “festa do divino” in Mesquita, he signals something surprising about the quilombo of Mesquita. The surprise of this inclusion is remarked in a local newspaper at the time of *Quilombo*'s release, which, as I mentioned above, noted that the ‘vestiges’ of black culture were not very strong, being that the residents of Mesquita are all Catholic. The accompanying photograph depicts Mesquita's one-room church in the background, a community elder in the foreground, and equidistant from both, a giant white cross in the middle ground. This photograph, surely provided by the filmmaker, undermines two beliefs about contemporary quilombos: first, that they are isolated communities, and second, that they are, in the words of Abdias do Nascimento, “localities, unlinked to the mainstream of the country's life, maintaining African or quasi-African lifestyles and habits.” The inclusion of the “festa do divino” sequence in *Quilombo* directly contradicts this view as the celebration of a Portuguese festival testifies to the relative success of the colonizer's “civilizing mission.” Now, it could be that Mesquita is actually an exception in this regard—an uncommon quilombo. But that Carvalho titled his film “Quilombo” after the generic name for a runaway slave society, and not “Mesquita” suggests that Carvalho is not just interested in talking about the community of Mesquita in particular, but rather about the quilombo in general. Let me be clear: the issue here is not the truth of the matter—i.e. whether contemporary quilombos maintain “African lifestyles” or not (this is a question for historians and anthropologists)—but rather the way in which Carvalho's film takes, perhaps unwittingly, a position on the question. If *Aruanda* casts the utopian aspiration of the quilombo in

⁸⁸ For more on the “festa do Divino,” see Emílio Willems, “Acculturative Aspects of the Feast of the Holy Ghost in Brazil,” *American Anthropologist* 51.3 (1949).

terms of its collective, non-alienated labor practices and not in terms of a discretely Afro-Brazilian or African culture, *Quilombo* similarly rejects views like Abdias do Nascimento's but also de-emphasizes the utopian kernel of unalienated artisanal labor.

As in *Aruanda* and *Bolandeira*, much of *Quilombo* is dedicated to depicting a process of production—this time of quince marmalade. The quince is planted collectively; its flowers bloom; the rain comes and the quince fruit emerges; it is picked collectively and tossed into metal buckets; the fruit is peeled and washed; boiled; pureed; reheated; cooled. But unlike in *Aruanda* and *Bolandeira*, which depicted production as a linear process, avoiding all implication of simultaneous action, *Quilombo* adds simultaneous action to the account. While the quince is being grown and harvested and conserved, four by six inch open-topped wooden boxes are being fashioned to package the marmalade. A tree is cut down; it is sawed into several pieces with the help of a water-powered saw in a roofed woodshop; the carpenter cools the saw with water; he cuts even wood planks for the sides and bottoms of the boxes; he nails the boxes together; he sands them; checks them. His work is intercut with the work of a sixty-year old veteran marmalade producer, his wife, and helpers. We see that at least a dozen different people have contributed to the effort so far. The marmalade is evenly poured into the boxes and loaded onto a truck by a team of children. The boxes are evenly distributed in rows on the trucks. From a bird's eye perspective, the camera slowly zooms in on the trucks with its rows of open boxes of quince marmalade. The effect is an abstract, geometrical study in shape and color; the quince marmalade is transformed from purposive, edible handicraft to purposeless modernist canvas (figure 16). The point is made again: craft is art.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ This is analogous to the shot in *Aruanda* in which the upside down ceramic housewares are transformed into a surrealist scene of fragile, giant eggshells. See figure 1.



Figure 16. Quince Marmalade Drying in the Sun, still from *Quilombo* (Carvalho, 1975)

But the effect this time is different. While the crosscutting of *Quilombo* suggests community cooperation and a division of labor, it also breaks up the mesmerizing drama of work so lyrically rendered in *Aruanda*. One odd effect of breaking up activities that are surely taking place simultaneously—say, the gathering of water from a well and the kneading of clay—and rendering them instead sequentially is that it imposes a narrative arc that, it may be argued, is actually internal to all activity: every task, every instance of making and doing no matter how basic, has its own beginning, middle, and end. We do not usually think of micro-actions—like the kneading of clay—as unfolding narrative dramas, capable of generating a peculiar kind of spectatorial desire: the desire to see the activity completed without loose ends.⁹⁰ While I certainly do not mean to argue that cross-cutting undermines narrative in general, I do wish to suggest that in *Quilombo* cross-cutting undermines the narrative integrity of each micro-action and the concomitant spectatorial effect of treating quotidian activities as narratives in themselves. Of course, making boxes (activity 1) for the marmalade and preparing the marmalade (activity 2) are two parts of a single process—which is the fabrication of quince

⁹⁰ This is part of what makes Muybridge's motion studies so fascinating: movement is broken down into its component micro-parts, and rendered sequentially. If Muybridge gives us the drama of movement, Carvalho gives us the corollary drama of labor.

marmalade for sale (in boxed units) at market—still, cutting back and forth between these overlapping activities interrupts our sense of these activities as unfolding narratives begging for coherence and completeness in their rendering (figure 17). The mesmerizing character of involvement experienced by watching micro-activities begun, pursued, and completed without cutting away—think of the scene of Nanook making a window for his igloo in *Nanook of the North*, or the boat repair scene in *Man of Aran*, or even more so, the ceramic sequence in *Aruanda*—is achieved only secondarily by the long take. In fact, I would argue that rendering action narratively—that is, sequentially and without digressions—achieves the effect of a special kind of spectatorial absorption.⁹¹ *Quilombo* has its mesmerizing moments, but the crosscutting mitigates the effect. I argued above that *Aruanda*'s mesmerizing treatment of labor—its aesthetic of labor, if you will—produces a visceral sense of labor as art, of labor as, in the words of Löwy, “the free expression of human creativity.” If one's challenge were to provide a viewer with a visual account of a foundational premise of Marxism—“that work is the fundamental and central activity in human life,”⁹² “life's prime want” in a well-ordered society⁹³—*Aruanda* would come close to meeting that challenge. *Quilombo* certainly exhibits the aesthetic of labor, but its focus is really elsewhere: *Quilombo* turns its attention to the question of utopia.

⁹¹ While I think that extrapolating the effects of film texts on spectators from one's own viewing experience can be problematic, I cannot pass up the chance to try to articulate what I think is a special kind of spectatorial absorption. What I am trying to describe here is not like character identification. V.F. Perkins notion of “involvement” fits better perhaps. Perkins writes, “A direct relationship with the screen characters offers the surest way of maintaining our involvement. But the fiction film can function without these relationships. We can become involved in the action of a picture which precludes a specific loyalty, a direct emotional commitment to particular characters” (140). I am trying to describe involvement in the drama of action as such. How it is that certain filmic accounts of quotidian activities can be mesmerizing, hypnotic? In this regard, it might be interesting to look at fiction films like *Jeanne Dielman* (Chantal Akerman, 1975), *Beau Travail* (Claire Denis, 1999), *Pickpocket* (Bresson, 1959), and *A Man Escaped* (Bresson, 1956). For Perkins' treatment of the distinction between “involvement” and “identification,” see V. F. Perkins, *Film as Film : Understanding and Judging Movies*, 1st Da Capo Press ed. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1993).

⁹² Sayers, “Creative Activity and Alienation in Marx and Hegel.” Sayers counters the efforts of structuralist Marxists to sharply distinguish between the young Marx of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* and the mature Marx of *Capital*, particularly around the issue of alienation and species being. Sayers' tries to reconstruct Marx's views on labor and its role in man's self-realization. He finds evidence throughout Marx's corpus for the view that work is man's ‘vital activity,’ his ‘human essence.’ For another effort to recuperate Marx's humanism and the unity of his thought particularly around the question of alienation, see István Mészáros, *Marx's Theory of Alienation*, 5th ed. (London: Merlin, 2005).

⁹³ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, [1st ed. (Peking,: Foreign Languages Press, 1972).



Figure 17. Production Process. *Quilombo* (Carvalho, 1975).
 Fifteen shot fragment from a long production sequence that crosscuts between the making of the woods boxes that will hold the quince marmalade and the making of the marmalade itself.

Utopia has been a constant preoccupation of the films I have been discussing. Even *O País de São Saruê*, the most significant film of Carvalho's Paraíba cycle, is named after a cordel poem by Manoel Camilo dos Santos about a land where rivers flow with milk, where lakes are filled with honey, where the rocks are made of cheese, where all the women are beautiful, etc. But unlike *O País de São Saruê* and *Aruanda* (whose title means "promised land"), the utopian suggestion is ambiguously inscribed in *Quilombo*'s title: "quilombo" is often a value-neutral term, used in the work of social scientists to refer descriptively to communities of escaped slaves. Like "aruanda," it apparently also comes from Bantu and literally means "protected encampment." In the credit sequence, Carvalho gives the title a more particular resonance when he superimposes the title text on a framed oval family photograph hanging on a white wall. In doing so, he emphasizes the sense of this quilombo community as a kind of family unit, attenuating its utopian pretensions (figure 18).



Figure 18. Opening image and background for the credit sequence. *Quilombo* (Carvalho, 1975)

Quilombo combines an official voice-of-god narration with the first person voice-over of Dito Nonato, a 60-year-old community elder. While Dito provides most of the narration, it is entirely voice-over and never synchronous. As in *A Pedra da Riqueza*, we are never quite sure that the figure we see involved in quotidian activities and absent from the camera's lens corresponds to the disembodied voice we hear on the audio track. The film's audio recounts the history of Mesquita, its current economic difficulties, and the threat of land speculation to its future cohesion. This narration tells a familiar story of decline: rapid urbanization and industrialization are jeopardizing the Mesquita "way of life." Two of the community's elders, brothers, have died prematurely, each a victim of modernity. One brother was run over upon his return from Luziânia while crossing a four-lane highway—his head, the film reports, was separated from his body and so deformed by unrelenting traffic that when it was found he was unrecognizable. The voice-of-god official narration of Severinho's fate is accompanied by images of a generic highway with cars and trucks complacently zooming past. The horror of the audio narration combines with the images of speeding vehicles to evoke the dehumanization of the reign of the machine and the anonymity of this modernity that did not flinch at the sight of the severed head of Mesquita's "bearer of memory." The other brother, Etelvino, died of cancer after years of working as a plantation fumigator. Fumigation—another index of the mixed legacy of "progress." The final blow is dealt again solely by the narration unaccompanied by a literal visual illustration. It turns out that the youth of Mesquita are taking construction jobs in the city and relocating to the *favelas* of Brasília. Meanwhile, residents of Mesquita are selling their newly valued land to Brasília real estate speculators looking to meet the demand among Brasília's elite for cottages in the country. If one of the thematic emphases of *Arunda* is Olho d'Água's isolation, in *Quilombo*, the emphasis is on Mesquita's proximity to the sprawling city of Brasília.

The geographic distance between Mesquita and Brasília is crucial to the film. The film opens with an extreme long shot of a few high-rises with antennas jutting up from their tops. This is Brasília, Dito de Nonata reports. The film is locating itself in relation to the city that did not exist when Mesquita's slaves first inherited this land. And this is the heart of *Quilombo's* story: Mesquita, too far from god, too close to Brasília. Interestingly, Brasília is a sort of absent presence in the film; it is pictured in long shot as a vaguely

adumbrated skyline of concrete boxes and it is referred to in the audio narration, but otherwise, Brasília is the specter haunting the film. The contrast between the distant city and this rural community turns out to be the contrast between two conceptions of utopia—the modernist utopian city designed to overcome social inequity spatially and architecturally and the pastoral utopian ideal of an “Aruanda.”

Brasília was constructed with utopian pretensions. The building of Brasília was undertaken in 1957 by the populist president of Brazil, Juscelino Kubitschek, who campaigned on the promise to transfer Brazil’s capital from Rio de Janeiro to the interior of the country. The new capital, Brasília, would integrate the interior of the country into the national economy, providing jobs and infrastructure, and spreading the nation’s wealth to long neglected land-locked subsistence economies. It would herald Brazil’s emergent identity as a modern nation. Knowing that if the project was not completed before he left office it would not be completed at all, Kubitschek promised the inauguration of the new capital by the close of his administration.

The Brasília project was the quintessential expression of the developmentalist ideology that had been spreading throughout Latin America since the mid-1940s and that had been adopted by Kubitschek. Developmentalism was a liberal ideology, deeply influenced by the 19th century positivism of Comte and Spencer, committed to progress, science, and the notion that society could be reformed through the conscious, rational policies of an activist state.⁹⁴ In Latin America, this meant that nations that had long been exploited by the metropolitan centers—to which they provided raw materials in exchange for manufactured goods—thought that they could develop themselves, that they could, through decent state policies, one day match the level of material wealth and technological development of the global north. One commonly implemented strategy to further this end was import-substitution industrialization.⁹⁵ Rather than importing manufactured goods and technology from abroad, these countries would invest in national industrialization projects: they would build factories and legally protect nascent national industries; they would implement

⁹⁴ Ramon Grosfoguel, "Developmentalism, Modernity, and Dependency Theory in Latin America," *Nepantla: Views from South* 1.2 (2000).

⁹⁵ Immanuel Wallerstein, "After Developmentalism and Globalization, What?," *Social Forces* 83.3 (2005).

neomercantilist policies, just as the economic powerhouses of the west had done in the 18th century, as an intermediate step toward the free-trade ideal that was widely shared by the proponents of developmentalism.

Developmentalism had nationalist strains like the one to which Kubitschek ascribed as well as its more leftist strains.⁹⁶ The construction of Brasília testifies to the compatibility of these orientations. On the one hand, it was designed by the socialist architect Oscar Niemeyer, a lifelong member of the communist party and a disciple of Le Corbusier, and the left-liberal urban planner Lucio Costa, both of whom imagined it as a modernist utopian city of the future, a city that would ameliorate class division by virtue of its design.⁹⁷ On the other hand, it was built by Kubitschek, who cared little for Niemeyer and Costa's vision of social change. Anthropologist James Holston has argued that one key question presented by the construction of Brasília is "how both 'communists and capitalists' can find their views signified by the very same set of symbols," or put another way, "why does modernism in Brazilian architecture signify change toward egalitarianism, collectivism, and socialism for one group, and toward nationalist development for the other?"⁹⁸ For Holston the answer lies in the close link between modernism and modernization, which both embrace the aim of innovation and, in the Brazilian context, a break with the colonial past. Moreover, this modernist architectural style required industrial-age building materials; it demanded cars and emphasized speed at a time when Kubitschek's was focusing on developing the automobile industry; and it required a

⁹⁶ For a discussion of the connections between developmentalism and dependency theory, see Grosfoguel, "Developmentalism, Modernity, and Dependency Theory in Latin America." For Grosfoguel, the 'dependency school' shares with developmentalism the commitment to the "modernist idea that progress was possible through a rational organization of society" (361). What distinguishes the *dependentistas* (dependency school) from the other strains of developmentalism including the cepalistas (associated with the Economic Commission for Latin America) and the orthodox Marxists is that the *dependentistas* rejected the strict stagism of both. They believed that development could not be achieved within capitalism because a national bourgeoisie that was inevitably coopted by multinational corporations could not carry out the project of national development. Only a socialist state (even within a capitalist world-system) could achieve autonomous national development (361). Implicit in Niemeyer and Costa's vision is a view analogous to the dependency school's in its application of Lenin to architecture. They believed, and this is a point made by Holston, that modernist architecture could by-pass the intermediate steps that had characterized European development, that it could be the cause (rather than the effect) of an enveloping socialist transformation of society (77-82). "The construction of new cities, especially capitals, would stimulate technology, establish networks of communications, integrate vast and backward regions of untapped resources, and organize social relations collectively to maximize the potential benefits of the machine" (Holston 82).

⁹⁷ One means of overcoming class division was to be found in the organization of residential space. Most of the population (66%) would live in apartment blocks or *superquadras*. The *superquadras* of all levels of government workers would be practically identical. Costa's design emphasized green and collective space. Each *superquadra* would have its collective facilities like child care, school, recreation, and shops. All *superquadra* residents would have equal access to these facilities and the facilities would promote association across classes and status groups. The abundant green space would provide incentives for outdoor socialization. Four *superquadras* would constitute a neighborhood unit and each neighborhood unit would in turn have an abundance of common facilities (pools, clubs, snack bars, church, cinema, playing fields) to promote neighborhood cohesion and sociability. For an in-depth description of how the plan for the city of Brasília aimed to transform social experience, see James Holston, *The Modernist City : An Anthropological Critique of Brasília* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

⁹⁸ Ibid. 95.

powerful state capable of orchestrating such monumental projects. In other words, the Niemeyer/Costa plan presupposed the very industrialization that developmentalists like Kubitschek were pursuing, and its realization would be the index of those crusaders' success.⁹⁹

By the time Carvalho arrived in Brasília in the late 1960s, the utopian hopes of the city's planners had come to naught. The workers who built the city were largely migrants, many from the northeast. They had come in pursuit of jobs, new opportunities, and the chance to participate in the process of nation building. They lived in poor conditions while the city was being built; they worked without protections; and they had been thwarted by state forces when they tried to organize. When the city was inaugurated, they were excluded from its center, from the very structures they had built. With no place to go, they set up makeshift accommodations in squatter settlements, which only later became legally recognized satellite cities—cities that would become as vicious and deprived as the *favelas* of the coastal metropolises. This was the ultimate paradox of the city of Brasília: its demanding construction brought into being a class of people—impoverished, uneducated, homeless—that its utopian aspirations could not accommodate without abandoning those hopes. In an effort to retain that utopian promise and to defy the reality of the nation, the government had, in the words of Holston, “produced a unique city, but not the one they imagined. Rather, they turned Brasília into an exemplar of social and spatial stratification”; “they created an exaggerated version—almost a caricature—of what they had sought to escape.”¹⁰⁰

For the planners wanted to make Brasília an exemplar of development by negating the conditions of underdevelopment in the city's construction and settlement—not by displacing them from coast to the interior, or by transporting them from the big cities to Brasília, or by transposing them into another scale. Yet, the very existence of satellite cities, in which almost three quarters of the population of the Federal District live, subverts the intention profoundly: it reproduces the distinction between privileged center and disprivileged

⁹⁹ Ibid. 95-6.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid. 200.

periphery that is one of the most basic features of the rest of urban Brazil, of the underdevelopment Brasília's planners wanted to deny in building their new world.¹⁰¹

With the collapse of the utopian pretensions of Brasília's planner and architect came the collapse of the modernist project that the building of Brasília had embodied. Holston has argued that Brasília was a CIAM city; that is, a city built in accordance with the aims of the *Congrès Internationalaux d'Archetecture Moderne* (CIAM), the major international discussion forum for modernist architects and planners from 1928 to the 60s. Moreover, Brasília was designed by the disciples of Le Corbusier, who was the author of CIAM's defining manifesto ("The Athens Charter") and its major figure.¹⁰² Although the Congress managed to unify participants across a broad political spectrum, it did so on the basis of a fundamental consensus on the modernist commitment to radical change and on architecture's capacity to effect such social transformation. Holston explains:

CIAM modernism links architectural innovation, perceptual change, and social transformation in a utopian mode. Although it considers that innovation develops through a search for architectural forms that 'condense' new types of social experience, it views the relationship between architecture and society as transitive: change the architecture and society will be forced to follow the program of social change that the architecture embodies... As the means to this new society is built form, modernism argues that radical social change can and indeed must occur without social revolution. The utopian sidestep is precisely the challenge and the appeal of the final sentences of Le Corbusier's 1923 manifesto: 'Architecture or Revolution. Revolution can be avoided.'¹⁰³

The reality of Brasília undermined the utopianism of CIAM's brand of modernism. The "development inversion"—the idea that development across Brazil would follow from the construction of Brasília—did not pan out.¹⁰⁴ Even Niemeyer eventually conceded the point: "I see now that a social architecture without a

¹⁰¹ Ibid. 28.

¹⁰² Ibid. 30-42.

¹⁰³ Ibid. 56.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. 77.

socialist base leads to nothing—that you can’t create a class-free oasis in a capitalist society, and that to try ends up being, as Engels said, a paternalistic pose that pretends to be revolutionary.”¹⁰⁵

For any politically engaged modernist artist Niemeyer’s words must hit home. His claim implicates all modernists who harbor the conviction that their aesthetic efforts can single-handedly effect political change. Certainly there is something of this conviction in Glauber Rocha and the other Cinema Novo filmmakers. They at least thought that by producing films within an artisanal mode of production they could wrest a realm of freedom from the prison of alienated industrial production.

But the Paraíba school of documentary, of which Carvalho is the most important exemplar, is oddly positioned in relation to Cinema Novo’s indisputably modernist project. Carvalho’s work is caught between the avant-gardism of the Cinema Novo movement and the poetic realism of Flaherty. Still, the utopianism of his films from *Aruanda* through *Quilombo* is susceptible to critiques like Niemeyer’s. After all, they go in search of the utopian kernel within Brazilian reality. Importantly, Carvalho did change course after *Quilombo*.¹⁰⁶ He did not abandon the examination of work, but he did alter his approach. His greatest works of the subsequent years explored Brasília, its contradictions, and workers’ and students’ efforts to organize and resist.¹⁰⁷ In other words, Carvalho’s major projects take up the development of “a socialist base.” *Brasília Segundo Feldman* (1979) turns to the early years of Brasília’s construction and juxtaposes the original footage of an American architect (Eugene Feldman) who visited the city in its final year of construction with the vague story of a massacre of workers. In *Perseghini* (1984), Carvalho investigates the emergence of class-consciousness among Brasília’s construction workers. In the 175-minute two-part film, *Conterrâneos Velhos de Guerra* (1990), Carvalho examines again the lives of the workers who built Brasília: their origins, their efforts to organize, their repression by the state. *Barra 68, sem Perder a Ternura* (2000) focuses on the struggle of students at the

¹⁰⁵ Niemeyer quoted in *Ibid.* 93.

¹⁰⁶ The timing here is complicated. While it is true that *Quilombo* was not released until 1975 (after films such as *O Espírito Criador do Povo Brasileiro* [1973], *Itinerário de Niemeyer* [1974] and *Vila Boa de Goyaz* [1974]), it belongs to an earlier period in Carvalho’s work. Carvalho first visited Mesquita three years before actually filming *Quilombo*. This would have been 1972. But because he could not get funding for the project initially, production was at a standstill for three years. For an account of the funding difficulties, see Carvalho, *Cinema Candango: Matéria De Jornal*. Also, although the last film Carvalho made about a rural community, *Mutirão* (1976), touches on the production of carpets, it illustrates a turn toward folklore present in *Quilombo*’s treatment of the “festa do Divino.” I would therefore end the cycle of production films (begun with *Aruanda*) with *Quilombo*.

¹⁰⁷ Since 1970, Carvalho made other films not concerned with Brasília including *O Espírito Criador do Povo Brasileiro* (1973), *Vila Boa de Goyaz* (1974), *O Homen de Areia* (1982), *Zum-Zum* (1996), and *O Engenho de Zé Lins* (2000). All of these films concentrate on the work of Brazilian artists, most are bio-pics. Still, these also constitute a significant departure from his production films.

University of Brasília, which culminated in the occupation of the campus by military troops in 1968. How did the failures of Brasília's utopian project affect Carvalho's work?

In *Quilombo*, Carvalho faces the question of utopia squarely one last time before dropping the topic entirely. His works about the northeastern sertão find a utopian element in rural communities. But while *Quilombo* rejects the utopian aspirations of the social architecture of Brasília, it takes no refuge in the community of Mesquita. The utopianism of *Aruanda* is attenuated in *Quilombo*. Mesquita is no utopia of unalienated labor. Surely there are traces of the aesthetic of labor, but the point is made that one cannot create a class-free oasis in a capitalist society. Mesquita is shown to be integrated into a capitalist society in a way Olho D'Água was not; just as Brasília is not free from the surrounding society, neither is Mesquita. In *Quilombo*, Carvalho has restored a sense of the co-evalness of the quilombo—a space that exists in the same time and place as Brasília. The re-insertion of Mesquita in Brazil's temporal present undermines any argument about the unalienated labor of an isolated, autonomous community.

The threat of urbanization to Mesquita's "way of life" amounts to a loss for its members, but there is no escape. The tide of "development" and modernization is inexorable and wholly destructive. If there was a glimmer of hope for modernization in *Aruanda*, there is none in *Quilombo*. Meanwhile the utopia of labor in *Aruanda* has given way to the realities of land speculation and urbanization in *Quilombo*. The poetry of the production process is soon to be replaced by the prose of political activism. As the story of Mesquita unfolds on screen, the utopian credentials of the quilombo disintegrate. Is this a reflection of a disenchantment with the utopianism of politically ambitious avant-garde aesthetics? Unable to answer the question "who does the "aesthetic of labor" organize and how," Carvalho abandons the aesthetic of labor that he more than anyone elaborated. And with it, he abandons a utopian mode of political filmmaking and exchanges it for an overtly pedagogical one. Carvalho's subsequent films engage political questions directly (e.g. *Conterrâneos Velhos de Guerra*) or provide a kind of cultural education (e.g. *Vila Boa de Goyaz*). He does not abandon his obsession with work or land or nature. After all, he is a consistent, long-suffering socialist—impervious to faddishness. Perhaps this reflects Carvalho's new sense of the proper role of documentary in social transformation and the failures of avant-gardism. At 70 years old, Carvalho describes his career trajectory, and in particular, the

phases of his long-term commitment to the land. He writes, “Later, already having lived through other experiences, we learned that on the land and on her possession depended the survival of those dirty men of clay as well as those clean city folk who exploited their work. From that point on, innocence and poetry were finished.”¹⁰⁸

VII

I began this chapter with a discussion of the contemporary quilombo and its importance to the black movement. I argued that there is nothing natural, nothing inevitable, in the galvanizing role the quilombo has played in the story of black activism. The majority of the chapter was dedicated to remembering the now forgotten filmic use of the quilombo before it became a symbol of the Afro-Brazilian struggle against racism. In *Aruanda* we saw that the utopian aspiration represented by the quilombo had at its core the celebration of unalienated life-activity and not a peculiarly African or Afro-Brazilian culture. This approach to the quilombo has changed significantly in the forty some years following the making of *Aruanda* as the artisanal approach to filmmaking was abandoned and as the structural critique of capitalism was displaced by the ideology of multiculturalism.

Like the black movement, the Cinema Novo movement and the Paraíba school used the quilombo for their own ends. One could argue that these divergent deployments of the quilombo merely reflect the differing ideologies of their employers: the Marxists converted the quilombo into a symbol of the unalienated labor of a future socialist society, while the black movement used it to valorize the egalitarian credentials of a distinctly Afro-Brazilian culture. One might say that the Marxists did what Marxists have always done: buried race in a narrative about class. And the black movement resisted this master narrative, insisting on the racial specificity of the quilombo. Still, there is convergence here as well. After all, the claims of both sides depended on the utopian character of the quilombo. On the one side there is the utopianism of non-exploitative labor practices and on the other side the utopianism of transplanted cultural practices. But this

¹⁰⁸ Vladimir Carvalho, "Terra--Substantivo Concreto," *Vladimir 70: Mostra Retrospectiva Em Homenagem Aos 70 Anos Do Cineasta Vladimir Carvalho*, ed. Carmen and Caputo Moretzsohn, Gioconda (Brasília: Centro Cultural Banco do Brasil, 2005) 12. (translation mine)

convergence around the theme of utopia should attract our attention. First, because it reflects a peculiar Brazilian commitment to utopian discourses. And second, because it depends on a backwards gaze. As both sides tried to imagine a future radically different from the present, they found inspiration in a vaguely adumbrated past. And in order for this quilombo-past to work for their purposes, the quilombo as such had to be cast as isolated and autonomous—a non-exploitative oasis in the middle of colonial society before the Republic and a class-free oasis in the middle of capitalist society in the 20th century. The quilombo was thereby taken out of place and time; it was denied coevalness and this perhaps enabled it to function as an invented tradition.

4.0 *BUSH MAMA*: A CULTURALIST HEIR OF LATIN AMERICAN THIRD CINEMA

I

One difficult feature of writing about explicitly political films is that they often seem deceptively straightforward. Their didactic messages seem on the surface of the text, available for easy digestion. The referent of the representation—whether history, revolution, injustice, armed struggle—is always a real show-stealer as it distracts from the film’s textuality. These films give us a chance to finally talk about the world—the Algerian war of independence, the coup that ousted Allende, the immiseration of the Brazilian backlands—and not its mediations. And perhaps the more committed we are to transforming the world outside representation, the more satisfied we are to grasp coherent messages—to read with the grain, to eschew symptomatic analysis—and declare those messages to the skies. For if we have any hope for media’s capacity to affect the world, we must be heartened by didactic messages that reach their targets and transform consciousness, as promised. I think this must be what explains the critical reception of Haile Gerima’s 1976 *Bush Mama*.

One could hardly say that this film has been ignored by Film Studies. Most accounts of political cinema in the United States cite it as one of the most important independent films produced in this country. Within scholarship on African-American cinema, *Bush Mama* and *Killer of Sheep* are indisputably the summit of black independent filmmaking, the yardstick by which subsequent films have been judged and found

politically and aesthetically wanting.¹ While *Bush Mama* has been often mentioned in the critical literature, it has not been frequently closely analyzed.² And yet the film does not say everything about itself; it is not so straightforward as it seems. Besides offering ample material for the formal analysis of complex sound editing and narration techniques, *Bush Mama*'s politics are not nearly as coherent as has been presumed. Perhaps this is unsurprising considering the complexity of the ideological matrix in which the Los Angeles School of Black Filmmakers were situating themselves—somewhere between Third Cinema, Black Nationalism, the Black Arts Movement, and the Third World Liberation discourses of Frantz Fanon and Ngugi wa Thiong'o.³ While scholars like Ntongela Masilela have acknowledged that “members of the film movement never subscribed to a single, hegemonic ideology,”⁴ that “a dialectical tension between the cultural nationalism of the Black Arts Movement and the revolutionary nationalism of the Black Panther Party was central to the development of the members of the group,”⁵ little effort has been expended in tracking the expressions of these ideological

¹ See Mark Reid, *Redefining Black Film* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993) 113; Ed Guerrero, *Framing Blackness : The African American Image in Film*, Culture and the Moving Image (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); Manthia Diawara, "Black American Cinema: The New Realism," *Black American Cinema*, ed. Manthia Diawara (New York: Routledge, 1993).

² The exceptions are chapters in recent books by Frank Wilderson and Cynthia Young and an older piece by Mike Murashige. See Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Duke University Press, forthcoming); Cynthia Ann Young, *Soul Power : Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Mike Murashige, "Haile Gerima and the Political Economy of Cinematic Resistance," *Representing Blackness: Issues in Film and Video*, ed. Valerie Smith (London: Athlone Press, 1997).

³ Cynthia Young, following Masilela, an important commentator on the L.A. School, discusses the importance of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Homecoming* to the group's thinking. Young argues that Ngugi offered a corrective to Fanon: "Ngugi manages to break out of Fanon's all or nothing logjam.... Ngugi recognizes the dynamic exchange between indigenous cultural traditions and colonialism without altogether dismissing the import of cultural recovery and excavation" (231). The conflict Young points to owes to Fanon's greater skepticism toward "cultural recovery and excavation," a theme that will be addressed in more detail below. In what follows, I will not be discussing Ngugi's influence on the L.A. School. Not only is his corrective ultimately a minor one, but also I think Young overstates his influence relative to Fanon's. Even Masilela only mentions Ngugi in one sentence (in the midst of a list of other influential texts including *American Hunger* and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*): "Also prized was Ngugi wa Thiongo'o's *Homecoming*, which applied African Marxism, particular that of Fanon, to African cultural struggles, and opened new considerations of the revolutionary possibilities of language" (109). See Young, *Soul Power : Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left*; Ntongela Masilela, "The Los Angeles School of Black Filmmakers," *Black American Cinema*, ed. Manthia Diawara (New York: Routledge, 1993).

⁴ Masilela, "The Los Angeles School of Black Filmmakers," 109.

⁵ Ibid. The conflict between cultural nationalism and revolutionary nationalism has been frequently commented on in the literature. One account of the distinction between these two nationalisms has it that "a major defining characteristic of revolutionary nationalism... [is] an open engagement with Marxism (And generally Leninism), particularly with respect to political economy, Leninist notions of imperialism, and often Communist formulations of the "national question" (Smethurst 16). Meanwhile, cultural nationalism, according to Smethurst, is "an insider ideological stance (or grouping of related stances) that casts a specific 'minority' group as a nation with a particular, if often disputed national culture....It also often entails some notion of the development or recovery of a true 'national' culture that is linked to an already existing folk or popular culture" (Smethurst 17). See James Edward Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement : Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s*, The John Hope Franklin Series in African American History and Culture (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005). The starkest expression of the conflict between revolutionary and cultural nationalism comes from Huey P. Newton in a 1968 interview: "There are two kinds of nationalism, revolutionary nationalism and reactionary nationalism. Revolutionary nationalism is first dependent upon a people's revolution with the end goal being the people in power. Therefore to be a revolutionary nationalist you would by necessity have to be a socialist. If you are a reactionary nationalist you are not a socialist and your end goal is the oppression of the people. Cultural

conflicts in the films themselves. It bears mention that no commentators on *Bush Mama* have tried to pin down its political allegiances, much less have they remarked on the film's contradictory impulses. The film contains its own puzzles, which, though they remain unassembled, map the terrain of future black political filmmaking.⁶

In this chapter, I hope to accomplish two tasks. The first is to reconstruct the ideological links between Latin American Third Cinema and the Los Angeles School of Black Filmmakers (also L.A. School). This is necessarily not a project that owes to new historical, biographical, testimonial research that will allow me to say for certain what Burnett (*Killer of Sheep*) learned from Nelson Pereira dos Santos or Haile Gerima from Tomás Gutierrez Alea. Rather, it is a reconstructive effort in the sense that I will take the well-documented fact of influence and try to specify—using the works (both theory and practice) themselves as my sources—the conjunctures and disjunctures between these expressions of political cinema. My intention is not to police the boundaries of the term “Third Cinema,” but to add some precision to the oft-repeated, vague assertion that the L.A. School was influenced by Third Cinema. How was it influenced? What was adapted? Rejected? Reworked?

The second task of this chapter is a close reading of *Bush Mama*. Like so many Third Cinema films, *Bush Mama* is a “coming to consciousness” film. That is, it is a film that features a sympathetic character that

nationalism, or pork chop nationalism, as I sometimes call it, is basically a problem of having the wrong political perspective. It seems to be a reaction instead of responding to political oppression. The cultural nationalists are concerned with returning to the old African culture and thereby regaining their identity and freedom. In other words, they feel that the African culture will automatically bring political freedom. Many times cultural nationalists fall into line as reactionary nationalists. Papa Doc in Haiti is an excellent example of reactionary nationalism. He oppresses the people but he does promote the African culture. He's against anything other than black, which on the surface seems very good, but for him it is only to mislead the people. He merely kicked out the racists and replaced them with himself as the oppressor. Many of the nationalists in this country seem to desire the same ends. The Black Panther Party, which is a revolutionary group of black people, realizes that we have to have an identity. We have to realize our black heritage in order to give us strength to move on and progress. But as far as returning to the old African culture, it's unnecessary and it's not advantageous in many respects. We believe that culture itself will not liberate us. We're going to need some stronger stuff” (Philip Sheldon Foner and Clayborne Carson, eds., *The Black Panthers Speak* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Da Capo Press, 2002). Eddie Glaude has noted that even in this powerful eschewal of cultural nationalism there is an “implicit acknowledgement of the politics of transvaluation” (20) or the politics of revolutionizing the mind along cultural nationalist lines (e.g. “We have to realize our black heritage in order to give us strength to move on and progress.”) as means to an end. See Eddie S. Glaude, “Introduction: Black Power Revisited,” *Is It Nation Time? Contemporary Essays on Black Power and Black Nationalism*, ed. Eddie S. Glaude (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002). Recent works on the Black Arts Movement and Ron Karenga's US organization have cast doubt on the viability of this dichotomy between revolutionary nationalism and cultural nationalism, pointing out that the Black Arts Movement and the US organization pursued politics and economic policies simultaneously with cultural ventures. See Scot Brown, *Fighting for Us : Maulana Karenga, the Us Organization, and Black Cultural Nationalism* (New York: New York University Press, 2003); Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement : Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s*. For another perspective on the roots of cultural versus revolutionary nationalism, see Michael C. Dawson, *Black Visions : The Roots of Contemporary African-American Political Ideologies* (Chicago, Ill. ; London: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

⁶ There is a case to be made for *Bush Mama*'s direct and indirect links with Spike Lee's *Do the Right Thing* (1989) and *Bamboozled* (2000).

undergoes a dramatic political reeducation through the course of the film. But while the telos of that consciousness-raising has been taken to be unequivocally armed struggle, I will argue in what follows that there is a tension between the film's embrace of revolutionary violence and its cultural nationalism, signaled by the prominence of the main character's hair piece,⁷ which functions as a synecdoche for the yoke of Euro-American cultural imposition that must be thrown off. This tension reflects the film's odd positioning between the widely recognized ur-text of the L.A. School, Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, and the rarely mentioned *Black Skin, White Masks* that haunts the film's puzzles.

As part of my close reading of *Bush Mama*, I will contrast it with the other seminal film of the L.A. School, *Killer of Sheep* (Charles Burnett, 1977), as a way of shedding light on the peculiar approach *Bush Mama* takes to consciousness. Consciousness has been a central concern of political filmmaking. The ways in which films handle popular political consciousness—whether they treat it, as *Bush Mama* does, as something that is passed down by wise men; or whether they treat it, as *Killer of Sheep* does, as something already present, incipient, basically shaped by the material conditions of life—is crucial for specifying political programs. It is common in the literature to trace the differences between these two films back to the Marxist revolutionary internationalism of the African (Haile Gerima), and the cultural nationalism of the African-American (Charles Burnett); in other words, to the difference between the Fanon of Third World Liberation and the Amiri

⁷ In what follows, I will subscribe to Jennifer Jordan's understanding of cultural nationalism in "Cultural Nationalism in the 1960s: Politics and Poetry." Jordan identifies two strains within 1960s cultural nationalism: the first, most commonly associated with the phrase, refers to an Africanist (also Pan-African) strain that looks to Africa (or often to an mythical Africa) for cultural inspiration. The second strain gains inspiration from the culture produced by black people in America. For Jordan, both strains share a conservative, preservationist impulse: "This glorification of the cultural attainments of Afro-Americans tends to be a conservative force which grows out of a desire to see the Black man remain a distinct entity in the plastic and antihuman world called America" (31). Larry Neal, one of the architects of the Black Arts Movement, revealing this preservationist impulse, railed against the idea, unavoidable in Fanon, that a revolutionary change in society would usher in new, welcome cultural forms that do not carry within them the baggage of the colonized man. For Neal, without those past cultural forms, the reason for struggle loses it meaning: "A revolution without a culture would destroy the very thing that now unites us, the very things we are trying to save along with our lives. That is the feeling and love-sense of the blues and other forms of Black music [...] John Coltrane's music must unquestioningly be a part of any future revolutionary society" (quoted in Jordan, 31). For Jordan, this backward glance is an essential and controversial feature of cultural nationalism for, she writes, "[T]his desire [to see the Black man remain a distinct entity] means the attempted maintenance of qualities and elements of Black life which are destructive to Black people or, at least, supportive of the system that oppresses them. From the beginning the religion, the music, the dance provided solace for Black people, channeled energy that could have been used in revolt" (31). Other cultural nationalists avoided this critique by turning their backward gaze toward Africa, thus distancing themselves from the stigma of the scorned African American slave. Ron Karenga and Amiri Baraka followed this route. For more on 1960s cultural nationalism, see Jennifer Jordan, "Cultural Nationalism in the 1960s: Politics and Poetry," *Race, Politics, and Culture: Critical Essays on the Radicalism of the 1960s*, ed. Adolph L. Reed (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986). For more on the divide within the Black Arts Movement between those (mostly in the Northeast) who defended an autochthonous non-commercial black popular culture based in residual folk practices (a "popular" avant-garde) and those like Haki Madhubuti who embraced an alternative avant-garde black culture, see Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement : Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s*.

Baraka of the Black Arts Movement.⁸ My reading of *Bush Mama*, by bringing to light the neglected cultural nationalism at the core of the film, will recast the difference in terms of the films' approach to popular consciousness.

Despite their differences, the films share a commitment to the redemption of the black image. And this is a commitment that will ultimately distinguish the L.A. School from its Cuban Third Cinema counterparts and signal its departure from Fanon. Using the paradigmatic film, *Memories of Underdevelopment*, another film singularly concerned with consciousness, I will argue that the L.A. School creatively misappropriated the insights of Cuban Third Cinema, which was not ultimately infected with an archaeological spirit as far as pre-revolutionary culture was concerned. Cuban Cinema's commonly acknowledged turn to history—easily confused with a turn to a native past—had less to do with recuperating a past, native national culture as a fount of self-respect, and more to do with providing a teleological reading of Cuban historical progression that could ground the legitimacy of the Guevarian revolution.

II

The influence of Third Cinema on political filmmaking in the United States was for the most part negligible, except for its impact on a group of black filmmakers working in Los Angeles in the 1970s.⁹ The Los Angeles

⁸ In the words of one of its key figures, Larry Neal, the Black Arts Movement “is the aesthetic and spiritual sister of the Black Power concept” (Neal 29). According to Smethurst, both movements shared the common belief that African Americans constitute a separate nation with the right to self-determination. Furthermore, most tendencies within both movements, unlike the Garveyism that inspired them, emphasized the “need to develop, or expand upon, a distinctly African American or African culture that stood in opposition to white culture or cultures” (15). While this focus on culture was a feature of the Left, the New Negro Renaissance, and the Harlem Renaissance, Smethurst asserts that “never before...was such artistic activity made an absolute political priority and linked to the equally emphatic drive for the development and exercise of black self-determination within a large black political-cultural movement in the United States (16). The Black Arts Movement was a loose grouping of artists from the mid-1960s through the mid-1970s based all across the United States and working in a variety of media, especially poetry. Its most noted activists include, besides Neal, LeRoi Jones (Amiri Baraka), Haki Madhubuti, Askia Touré, Sonia Sanchez, Nikki Giovanni, A.B. Spellman, James Stewart. See Smethurst, *The Black Arts Movement : Literary Nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s*; Larry Neal, “The Black Arts Movement,” *The Drama Review* 12.4 (1968); David Lionel Smith, “The Black Arts Movement and Its Critics,” *American Literary History* 3.1 (1991).

⁹ The impact of Third Cinema on Chicano and Asian American filmmakers remains to be examined. Chon Noriega has summarized the history of the Ethno-Communications Program (1969-1973) established at UCLA by film professor Eliseo Taylor that successfully recruited and trained minority filmmakers in the 1970s, the very folks who would go on to found Public Broadcasting Consortia (including Latino Consortium and the National American Telecommunications Association) as well as media arts centers like Visual Communications. These minority students affiliated with the Ethno-Communications program must have also been exposed to Third Cinema theory and practice. Yet, while we do not know much about how and whether Third Cinema influenced their future practice, scholars unanimously mention Third Cinema (especially Cuban and Brazilian) in discussions of the L.A. School. This discrepancy should be further investigated. For an account of minority film training at UCLA in the 1970s, see Chon A. Noriega, *Shot in America : Television, the State, and the Rise of Chicano Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000).

School of Black Filmmakers, as the group was subsequently called, looms large in the history of independent black filmmaking in the United States. It was made up primarily of students attending UCLA. Many in the first wave of the movement—which included Charles Burnett, Haile Gerima, Ben Caldwell, Larry Clark, John Reir, Pamela Jones, Jamaa Fanaka—had not directly entered the Theater Arts Department (the film program), but instead got their start in a new Ethno-communications Program, which had been established in 1969 to diversify filmmaking at UCLA. Only after the efforts of student activists in Media Urban Crisis Committee (“Mother Muccers”) did the Theater Arts Department institute an affirmative action policy that would effectively diversify the department by reserving 25% of graduate and undergraduate places for minority students.¹⁰ The second wave of the L.A. School of Black Filmmakers included Billie Woodberry, Alile Sharon Larkin, Bernard Nichols, Barbara McCullough, Carroll Parott Blue, Zeinabu Irene Davis, Melvonna Ballenger, O. Funmilayo Makarah, Jacqueline Frazier, and Julie Dash.¹¹ This loose grouping also included non-filmmaker participants like the writer Toni Cade Bambara, the actress Barbara O. Jones, the doctoral students Teshome Gabriel and Ntongela Masilela.¹²

UCLA in the 1970s was a good place for politically-minded filmmakers. Unlike, for example, the USC program, which was also significantly more expensive,¹³ the UCLA department was oriented toward individual authorship: although students crewed on one another’s films, each student maintained artistic control over his or her own work; the finished films were the property of the students who produced them and thus could be distributed and exhibited by them in any way they saw fit. In addition, UCLA provided a lively intellectual environment that allowed students to engage theoretically with alternatives to Hollywood cinema.¹⁴

The alternative to Hollywood cinema that they most directly engaged with was the work of Third Cinema filmmakers and theorists, especially those from Latin America. The Los Angeles School of Black

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ David E. James, The Most Typical Avant-Garde : History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005). See also Masilela, “The Los Angeles School of Black Filmmakers.”

¹² Young, Soul Power : Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left.

¹³ This was a crucial factor in Charles Burnett’s decision to attend UCLA for graduate school. He was from a working class family in Watts, and he simply could not afford UCS enrollment fees. Director commentary on DVD.

¹⁴ James, The Most Typical Avant-Garde : History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles 327.

Filmmakers was deeply affected by their encounter with films from the Third World. In 1974, Teshome Gabriel, who was at the time a Ph.D. student but who would later be widely credited with introducing Third Cinema theory to Euro-American film scholars with the publication of his 1982 dissertation, *Third Cinema in the Third World: The Aesthetic of Liberation*,¹⁵ organized a weekly Third World Film Club. Through 1976, the club screened the work of radical filmmakers mostly from Latin American and Africa including Miguel Littín (Chile), Jorge Sanjinés (Bolivia), Solanas and Getino (Argentina), and Ousmane Sembene (Senegal).¹⁶ The Los Angeles School was especially influenced by the classics of Cuban and Brazilian cinema including *Memories of Underdevelopment* (Tomas Gutierrez Alea, 1968), *Lucía* (Humberto Solás, 1968), *The Last Supper* (Gutierrez Alea, 1976), and the work of Nelson Pereira dos Santos (Brazil) and Glauber Rocha (Brazil), who, invited by Gabriel, visited UCLA in 1978.

The L.A. School's identification with the Third Cinema project was premised on three common interests: a) national culture; b) "imperfect cinema"; and c) an independent mode of film production.

National Culture

In the work of Third Cinema filmmakers, the Los Angeles School saw a rigorous effort to think through the relationship between cinema and national culture.¹⁷ But that this problem (of the relationship between cinema and national culture) seemed relevant to the Los Angeles School reflects the extent to which these filmmakers understood the situation of black people in the United States to be analogous to the situation of the 'natives' of European colonies. In other words, it reflects the degree to which the framework of internal colonialism had become hegemonic in this circle; this framework was an autochthonous contribution, but one that allowed the L.A. School to directly engage with the work of those enmeshed in the decolonization debates.

The theory of internal colonialism was first introduced by Harold Cruse in his 1962 essay "Behind the Black Power Slogan." It was elaborated by Kenneth Clark's 1964 work *Youth in the Ghetto*, and it was

¹⁵ Teshome Gabriel's importance should not be underestimated. In a recent assessment of Third Cinema, Anthony Guneratne refers to the appearance of Gabriel's book as a "watershed," "the first work in English to undertake a comprehensive exposition of Third Cinema theory in relation to the social and political situations it addressed." See Guneratne and Dissanayake, Rethinking Third Cinema.

¹⁶ Masilela, "The Los Angeles School of Black Filmmakers."

¹⁷ Ibid.

popularized by Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton in their 1967 book, *Black Power*,¹⁸ but it had something of a pre-history in the Communist Party. In 1928, during the Comintern's Sixth Congress, it was decided that the communists' proper stance toward the "Negro National Question" should be to pursue a two-part strategy. In the South—in the so-called black belt—the Community Party, recognizing black people as an oppressed nation-within-a-nation, would advocate black self-determination. The liberation of the "black-belt" came to be seen as a matter of national liberation, a general principle long-embraced by both Lenin and Stalin. This strategy was known as the "black belt" thesis." The strategy in the industrial North would be quite different: it would remain roughly the same as it had been pre-1928 with the Communist Party USA (CPUSA) continuing to pursue inter-racial alliances and rejecting nationalist and separatist organizing initiatives, which, in practice, included hostile attacks on Marcus Garvey and others. This two-part regional strategy was pursued into the mid-1930s, then quietly abandoned until it was formally disavowed in 1958.¹⁹ The "black-belt" thesis developed by the Comintern in the early 1930s was certainly not the first instance in which African Americans had been seen as a distinct nationality: there was a long history of this in African-American thought. Still, this was the first time that the "African-American nation" had been understood to exist in a colonial relation to the American state. This new colonial analogy, which was resuscitated in the 1960s by Harold Cruse,²⁰ who had himself spent years in the CPUSA, would have distinct consequences for black nationalist activists and artists in the years to come.

The theory of internal colonialism developed in the 1960s has it that the oppression of minorities in the United States—in particular, African Americans—should be understood on the model of European colonialism. While it is true that in the United States obvious differences apply—there is no geographical

¹⁸ Bob Blauner, *Still the Big News : Racial Oppression in America*, Rev. and expanded ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).

¹⁹ See Dawson, *Black Visions : The Roots of Contemporary African-American Political Ideologies*; Stephen Howe, *Afrocentrism: Mythical Pasts and Imagined Homes* (London: Verso, 1998).

²⁰ Harold Cruse, who was trained by the Communist Party but had disavowed that affiliation, delivered a paper at the 1962 Socialist Scholars' Conference in which he tried to map a theoretical path that would allow Marxists to support the Black Power movement. He argues counter-intuitively that the Black Power movement is pro-capitalist, "neo-Booker T-ism," and on that basis, not despite it, deserves the support of socialists. For Cruse, Black Power represents the completion of the bourgeois national revolution that began in 1900 and was never completed in the black community. Quoting Lenin and Stalin, Cruse defends the importance of a bourgeois national revolution in underdeveloped places in order to develop the forces of production. He, thus, assumes that the black community is a kind of underdeveloped nation (suffering from too little capitalism), a domestic colony, in need of a bourgeois revolution that will empower black elites who will then undertake the task of developing the community. Harold Cruse, *Rebellion or Revolution?*, 1st University of Minnesota Press ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009).

distance between the mother country and the colony; at issue is the domination of the minority by a majority (not the case in most colonies); the land was originally settled by Native Americans, not African Americans, so that the problem is only partially one of the oppression of the original inhabitants. Still, the proponents of the domestic colonialism explanatory framework argue that slavery and European colonialism emerge from the same historical circumstances, that the former funded and made possible the latter. Furthermore, they maintain that European colonialism and the internal colonization of African Americans in the United States share four basic features. First, colonialism and internal colonialism, unlike ethnic immigration, both began with “forced, involuntary entry.”²¹ Second, colonial domination has intentionally destructive effects on the culture of colonized people. Third, the lives of colonized people are administered by dominant institutions including the police, the school system, the welfare system, etc. Finally, racist ideology tries to justify the differences in power, control, and autonomy between the colonized and the dominant group.²² The theory of internal colonialism, unlike the “black belt” thesis of a generation earlier, depends for its cogency on the realities of the black urban ghetto, for the black ghetto is a literal figuration of the internal colony, a colony within the “mother country”—a semi-bounded space of powerlessness, permanence, containment, dependence, a space that is economically and politically controlled from the “outside.” Indeed, the most seminal films of the L.A. School work with this unit of analysis—the ghetto or slum—which functions in the films very much like its own, separate nation.

The theory of internal colonialism was simultaneously used by Latin American commentators in the 1960s to explain the peculiar realities of recent postcolonial polities in Latin America in which the end of colonialism brings few changes for culturally heterogeneous, non-dominant groups—groups that end up having traded in a foreign exploiter for a native one. The advantage of such an explanatory model for the cases of Mexico, Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, for example, is that it can bring attention to intra-national fissures that have their basis, not primarily in class relations or regional relations (city versus country), but rather in race/ethnic relations. The concept of internal colonialism can harness the historical experience of

²¹ Blauner, *Still the Big News : Racial Oppression in America* 66.

²² Ibid.

colonialism to the contemporary experience of racism; in effect, it makes visible the inextricable link between these phenomena and their common fount.²³

The L.A. School's link to Latin American Third Cinema in particular, via the theory of internal colonialism, was not a perfect one. After all, only the work of Jorge Sanjinés is really concerned with the realities of the indigenous internal colony, in other words, the intra-national divisions within the nation-state. For most of the other filmmakers, the fissure that still mattered was the one between the First World and the Third. The national culture being forged in Cuba, in Brazil, in Argentina coincided with the actual territorial boundaries of the nation-state unlike in the case of the black internal colony of the United States. In Latin America, national culture's belated decolonization (over 100 years after independence) owed mostly to the lingering "psychic" reverberations of the colonial enterprise. For the L.A. School, the extent of colonization was ambiguous. While it was certainly the case that these filmmakers were concerned with a black national culture, many were more concerned with the realities of day-to-day semi-colonial structures like schools, welfare, police, city political machines, etc.

Imperfect Cinema

It is widely thought that the L.A. School was especially influenced by the Cuban filmmaker and theorist Julio Garcia Espinosa's 1969 manifesto, "For an Imperfect Cinema."²⁴ Espinosa's manifesto makes a persuasive argument for the primacy of a "committed cinema," that is, of an explicitly political cinema. But Espinosa makes the case not by adopting a moralistic frame (e.g. filmmakers should use the medium as a propaganda

²³ Pablo Gonzalez Casanova, "Internal Colonialism and National Development," Studies in Comparative International Development 1.4 (1965). In 1965, Pablo Gonzalez Casanova, applied the notion of "internal colonialism," an intra-national phenomenon, to postcolonial politics. In the understanding of internal colonialism that Casanova arrives at, the "structure of social relations based on domination and exploitation" takes place "among culturally heterogeneous, distinct groups" (33). In the Mexican case, internal colonialism would describe the situation of 25% of the Indian population that is exploited by the majority mestizo population. While neither group is foreign, both are in a sense "native," the relationship is colonial to the extent that the "native" category is culturally heterogeneous. Thus, Casanova is careful to distinguish "internal colonialism" from other kinds of stratification based solely in class relations or in regional differences (i.e. town versus country).

²⁴ See Young, Soul Power : Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left; Tommy L. Lott, "Aesthetics and Politics in Contemporary Black Film Theory," Film Theory And Philosophy, ed. Richard and Murray Smith Allen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Paula J. Massood, "An Aesthetic Appropriate to Conditions: *Killer of Sheep*, (Neo)Realism, and the Documentary Impulse," Wide Angle 21.4 (1999).

tool for changing the world) that follows from needs external to the art form.²⁵ Instead, he orients himself in relation to art, its function and place in society, and its trajectory. Perhaps it is for this reason that he frequently reminds the reader that his intervention is “not merely an ethical matter, but also aesthetic.”²⁶ For Espinosa, the practice of art belongs to everyone; properly understood, it is part of our life activity and he thereby uses folk art as his model for both past and future. That the practice of art in most societies (including Cuba’s) is relegated to an elite few, that it is subsumed in the division of labor (i.e. that it is treated as a job just like teaching or garbage collecting) suggests the extent to which society misunderstands its distinctive character. Espinosa aims to show that the commitment to the elite category of the “artist”—in other words, the commitment to a division of labor in which some produce art and others consume it—goes hand in hand with the pursuit “*ad eternum* [of] the ‘artistic quality’ of the work” as if ‘artistic quality’ was a legitimate telos for the practice of art in society.²⁷ By contrast, Espinosa argues that “[t]he new outlook for artistic culture is no longer that everyone must share the taste of a few, but that all can be creators of that culture. Art has always been a universal necessity; what it has not been is an option for all under equal conditions.”²⁸ Thus, Espinosa defends the ultimate aim of the democratization of access to the means of artistic production and of the practice of art in general (which would also require leisure time as well as

²⁵ I expend quite a lot of space here on Espinosa’s argument because it is often misunderstood. There have been several theoretical and semi-theoretical justifications for a political practice and criticism of art that, unlike Espinosa’s, oppose strictly aesthetic and/or formalist criteria. Clyde Taylor, for example, rejects aesthetic criteria altogether, defending a “postesthetics” practice in which “the relation of a sign to the discourses of power and resistance becomes primary” (82). Taylor distinguishes this “postesthetics” orientation from the “ethno-aesthetics” orientation embraced by the Black Arts Movement. “Ethno-aesthetics” aims to supplement western aesthetic criteria with non-western aesthetic criteria (i.e. the Black Aesthetic)—witness the formalist celebration of non-Western practices like “oral narrative, folklore and griotology” (81). Both postesthetics and ethno-aesthetics imply a critique of the injunction: art for art’s sake. While Espinosa doubts the universality of Western aesthetic taste as we have come to know it, he does not dispense altogether with a universalist embrace of a singular good and beautiful as do the ‘Ethno-aestheticians,’ for whom the good and the beautiful is relative. Nor does Espinosa reject the category of aesthetics as Taylor seems to. Rather, Espinosa argues that were the function of art in society properly understood, all would see that the future realization of this proper function (which is not so far from classical aesthetics: the issue is that classical aesthetics treat non-ideal conditions as if they were indeed ideal) demands a political practice of art in the present. From Espinosa’s perspective, Taylor’s account brings considerations from outside the realm of art—ethical/political/moral considerations—to bear on the question of a political practice of art. Such considerations would have little sway with those committed to aesthetics, meanwhile Espinosa’s argument would force the art community to rethink its operative assumptions about the nature and function of art. Perhaps he would prefer to slightly amend the injunction “art for art’s sake” to “art for art’s sake, for the sake of human flourishing.” For the Taylor view, see Clyde Taylor, “We Don’t Need Another Hero: Anti-Theses on Aesthetics,” *Blackframes: Critical Perspectives on Black Independent Cinema*, ed. Mbye B. Cham (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988); Clyde Taylor, *The Mask of Art: Breaking the Aesthetic Contract—Film and Literature* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).

²⁶ Julio García Espinosa, “Meditation on Imperfect Cinema...Fifteen Years Later,” *New Latin American Cinema, Vol. One: Theory, Practices and Transcontinental Articulations*, ed. Michael Martin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997) 84.

²⁷ Julio García Espinosa, “For an Imperfect Cinema,” *New Latin American Cinema, Vol. One: Theory, Practices and Transcontinental Articulations*, ed. Michael Martin (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997) 76.

²⁸ Ibid.

access). In this struggle to abolish the category of the elite “artist,” Espinosa advocates a “partisan,” “committed,” “imperfect” art practice whose purpose would be to help bring the actual practice of art in society in line with the proper function of art of in society, which is uncommitted, free, open, and resolutely heterogeneous and individual.

The “imperfect cinema” is not an end in itself; properly understood, it works towards its own dissolution. “Today art must assimilate its quota of work [i.e. committed activity] so that work can assimilate its quota of art.”²⁹ While Espinosa’s essay is often reduced to an argument for the legitimacy, celebration, valorization of a cinema of low production values,—in fact, underdeveloped means of production, grainy images, black and white film stock, etc. are not ends in themselves either.³⁰ The use of primitive equipment and technique is desirable only to the extent that it allows more people access to the means of film production; it lowers the bar for participation.³¹ But access alone is not the objective, at least not before the full democratization of art. And in order for us to understand this point (i.e. the significance of democratizing the practice of art), we need a different understanding of art’s function in society. If the telos of artistic production is the pursuit of transcendent “artistic quality” or “the beautiful,” Espinosa’s prescription will make no sense to us: surely democratization alone does not bring “artistic quality.” But if we grant his reorientation of the question of the function of art in society, then we can begin to elaborate a different set of

²⁹ Ibid. 79.

³⁰ It would be interesting to compare Espinosa’s essay to Glauber Rocha’s “An Esthetic of Hunger,” which also defends low production values but for different reasons. The essays have often been treated as distinct national expressions of the same sentiment. I actually do not think this is true.

³¹ In 1985, Espinosa published “Meditations on Imperfect Cinema...Fifteen Years Later.” In this essay he acknowledges that the argument of the 1969 essay had been frequently misconstrued. Many people thought that he was advocating the making of bad films. In his corrective, though, Espinosa does not exactly clear things up. This second attempt is rife with ambiguity as Espinosa concedes that he intentionally left the issue of bad filmmaking open and that he was a bit defensive because of the sense of impotence among Cuban filmmakers lacking in technical and other resources. The real puzzle of this second account comes when Espinosa says that the basis of the question of bad filmmaking was the following dilemma: “either you tried to make an artistic cinema, estranged from a public which had the potential for substantially changing reality, and these films would then be sent to the cinémathèques and become part of an anthology of great films; or you made films which posed, let’s say, the denunciation of a reality disguised by aesthetics, and which finally spoke to our exposed innards” (83). Surely while “For an Imperfect Cinema” rhetorically supports the second path, the reception of Cuban cinema abroad suggests that it actually fits comfortably into the category of “artistic cinema.” Where does this reality leave Espinosa? Defending “bad filmmaking” which is “important from a cultural point of view” but practicing internationally recognized “good filmmaking”? This paradox should be further explored particularly because the explicit occasion for the writing of “For an Imperfect Cinema” was concern over the attention Latin American cinema was garnering in Europe and the temptation that this attention represented—namely, the temptation to transform Cuban cinema into a cinema of quality, a “perfect” cinema. The internal critique of filmmaking in Cuba present in the first essay is lost in the second where the struggle against “artistic cinema” appears to have been won. But it could not have looked that way in 1985 given the canonization of the works of Espinosa himself, Tomás Gutierrez Alea, and Humberto Solás. See Espinosa, “Meditation on Imperfect Cinema...Fifteen Years Later.”

criteria for judging and evaluating art, criteria that will not preclude work lacking high production values. And the criteria for evaluating this “imperfect cinema”—this cinema of the pre-democratized present—are political criteria. Espinosa writes, “Imperfect cinema is no longer interested in predetermined taste, and much less in “good taste.” It is not quality which it seeks in an artist’s work. The only thing it is interested in is how an artist responds to the following question: What are you doing in order to overcome the barrier of the ‘cultured’ elite audience which up to now has conditioned the form of your work?”³²

Independent Filmmaking

The L.A. School of Black filmmakers were putting into practice Espinosa’s prescriptions. On the one hand, they were living examples of the democratization of access to the means of film production and their films, like their Cuban and Brazilian counterparts, reflected the relative poverty of their resources. For their minimal student fees, they had access to filmmaking equipment and to the advice of teachers and peers. Film school was so conducive to independent filmmaking that Charles Burnett famously did not want to graduate.³³ On the other hand, in the eyes of U.S. scholars of black cinema, their distance from industrial Hollywood cinema would earn them the label of “independent black filmmakers.” This descriptor was certainly not one adapted from the Latin American context, where there was not a viable industrial cinema on the Hollywood model and where the films from Brazil and Cuba that were being so avidly consumed by the UCLA set were for the most part funded by state institutions. All the films produced by Cuba’s state-funded *Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos* (ICAIC) since 1960 have been, in some counter intuitive sense, as far as most people are concerned, independent Cuban films—that is, independent from Hollywood.

In the U.S. context though, this “independent” label, especially when it came to black film, brought with it a set of unacknowledged commitments. Those involved in debates about independent black filmmaking—what is it, who makes it, what is it committed to—all can agree on at least one thing: that the L.A. School of Black filmmakers is the quintessence of independent black filmmaking in the United States.

³² Espinosa, "For an Imperfect Cinema."

³³ DVD commentary.

But they disagree on a lot more. Some scholars like Mark Reid who strictly defines independence in relation to sources of funding exclude Oscar Micheaux and Melvin Van Peebles from the category because these filmmakers received some studio funding. But still for Reid the distinction between independent and studio production is not merely a factual distinction. Studio affiliation casts a cloud over a film's aesthetics and politics such that any studio involvement for Reid automatically implies minstrel representation.³⁴ If Reid argues to exclude films and filmmakers from the vaunted "independent" category but makes no explicit claims about the politics of the independents, Ed Guerrero assimilates the fact of independent financing, or in his locution "guerilla cinema financing," to certain political commitments so that the category of independent becomes coterminous with politically liberatory film.³⁵ Manthia Diawara, also concerned with delineating the category of independent, includes studio-supported Blaxploitation films like *Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song* (1971) and *Ganja and Hess* (1973) because they are aesthetically and politically radical—radical in "their formal positioning of Black characters and Black cultures at the center of the screen, creating a sense of defamiliarization of the classical film language."³⁶ What do we learn from this disagreement? My point is merely that the "independent" label cannot seem to shake the expectation that films fitting under its rubric bear counter-hegemonic politics (as well as aesthetics). At issue in this expectation is the lingering question of the relation between a mode of film production and the text it produces—also an important theme in Third Cinema polemics, though secondary for the simple reason that there was no real local industrial competition.

Some have argued that the confusion over the politically pregnant label "independent" in contemporary black film scholarship betrays another problematic trend in the critics' approach to black film. In a provocative essay, scholar Tommy L. Lott traces a pervasive practice of contemporary black film criticism—namely, "evaluating a black film's aesthetic achievement primarily by reference to its political ideology"—back to the commitments of the L.A. School, which in turn had been adapted, or at least, deeply influenced to his mind by Espinosa's manifesto.³⁷ These L.A. School commitments entailed new criteria of

³⁴ See Lott, "Aesthetics and Politics in Contemporary Black Film Theory," 284-5.

³⁵ Ibid. 286.

³⁶ Diawara, "Black American Cinema: The New Realism," 10.

³⁷ Lott, "Aesthetics and Politics in Contemporary Black Film Theory," 282.

judgment that neither fetishized technical achievement nor that bracketed politics. Disapproving of politicized criticism practice, Lott defends a more pluralist, eclectic approach to black film criticism, one that does not “internalize” or “functionalize” the new poetics of Third Cinema: “Different films display strengths and weaknesses with regard to their political orientation, aesthetic orientation, or their reception by a black audience. Hence, there is no single fixed criteria that can be generally used to appraise black films. Audience reception is a strength of mainstream black films and political and aesthetic orientation are strengths of Third Cinema, but in either case both political and aesthetic criteria come into play.”³⁸ Lott would sever evaluation from politics and politics from mode of filmic production. That the three were sutured together is what concerns us here, for Lott is perhaps right that the presumption of the entire spectrum of black film criticism is that black film should do something more, something other than industrial cinema—that it had a part to play in black liberation. The suppressed premise that Lott exposes and tries to challenge has it that black film should be political and that it is right and good that it should be judged by that yardstick.³⁹

But if Lott’s analysis of the black film scholarship scene is right, there remains a question about what sort of political commitments count as liberatory. It turns out that there is substantial ambiguity on this question, which may perhaps explain the schizophrenic assessments of the work of the most significant black filmmaker of the contemporary moment, Spike Lee. While the work of the L.A. School seems to constitute a sort of widely agreed upon standard, even the work nestled within this category is itself politically

³⁸ Ibid. 283.

³⁹ This 1997 view represents a reversal of Lott’s earlier position expressed in a 1991 article, “A No-Theory Theory of Black Cinema,” which was first published in *African American Review*. Oddly enough, it is this earlier essay that has been frequently reprinted in collections about African American cinema and culture, including Lott’s own 1999 text, *The Invention of Race: Black Culture and the Politics of Representation*. Perhaps the explanation for this odd publication detail can be traced to the fact that the earlier view is more palatable as it shares the same suppressed premises as the going scholarship. In the earlier essay Lott grapples with the category of “black cinema.” He argues that the designation should be defined—like Third Cinema—not by reference to the racial/ethnic identity of filmmakers, but by reference to politics: “As a primarily oppositional practice engaged in resistance and affirmation, black cinema need not be presently defined apart from its political function” (93). Furthermore, Lott writes, “I want to advance a theory of black cinema that is in keeping with those filmmaking practices that aim to foster social change, rather than participate in a process of formulating a definition of black cinema that allows certain films to be canonized on aesthetic grounds so as to occupy a place in the history of cinema. The theory we need now is a political theory of black cinema that incorporates a plurality of aesthetic values that are consistent with the fate and destiny of black people as a group engaged in a protracted struggle for social equality” (93). While in this earlier essay Lott subordinates aesthetic values to liberatory politics, in the later essay, referenced above, Lott hopes to free black film aesthetics from ideological considerations. While in the earlier essay he holds up Third Cinema as a model for black filmmaking to emulate, in the latter essay he accuses Third Cinema evaluation criteria of prescriptively reducing film criticism to “moral judgment.” Lott’s language here suggests that he targets the merging of the political and the moral realm in a practice of film criticism that sifts good versus bad texts according to their politically progressive versus politically reactionary ideological commitments. See Tommy L. Lott, “The No-Theory Theory of Black Cinema,” *Representing Blackness: Issues in Film and Video*, ed. Valerie Smith (London: Athlone Press, 1997).

heterogeneous. Still, it seems worth acknowledging that the one baseline, commonly held commitment of black film scholars is a commitment to a politics of the black image. It is perhaps for this reason that so many engagements with black cinema begin—as Manthia Diawara’s frequently anthologized essay, “Black American Cinema: The New Realism,” does—with a discussion of *Birth of a Nation*,⁴⁰ the exemplar case of the denigrated black image in American film. Scholar Mark Reid reveals his political concerns when he writes, “[T]he critics and historians must analyze the independent film in terms of the filmmaker’s efforts to create films that explore serious social issues and present balanced images of black women, men, and the African-American community.”⁴¹ Ed Guerrero, in his embrace of the black independents of the 70s, credits the movement with the ultimate achievement: laying “a clear political, philosophical, and aesthetic foundation for an ongoing cinematic practice that challenges Hollywood’s hegemony over the black image.”⁴² Reid, Guerrero, and others are unmistakably indebted to image analysis, that is, to the constant tallying of positive versus negative images that is a feature of this analytic approach. The ubiquity of image analysis in the analysis of minority cinemas should not be underestimated. Michele Wallace has observed that “Mainstream culture habitually assumes that the first job of Afro-American mass culture...should be to ‘uplift the race’, or to salvage the denigrated image of blacks in the white American imagination.”⁴³

This has been no less the case with the films produced by the L.A. School. Even one of its most famous exemplars, *Bush Mama*, subscribes, in more and less obvious ways, to a politics of the black image. But, as I will argue in the last section of this chapter, this preoccupation with the denigrated image that needed to be salvaged, avenged, was not, in general, the priority of Third Cinema film politics. This tension around the status of the stereotype and its relevance to a political film practice is central to thinking about the relation between Third Cinema and the L.A. School.

Now we turn directly to the film, *Bush Mama*.

⁴⁰ Diawara, “Black American Cinema: The New Realism.”

⁴¹ Reid, *Redefining Black Film* 135.

⁴² Guerrero, *Framing Blackness: The African American Image in Film* 137.

⁴³ Michele Wallace, *Invisibility Blues: From Pop to Theory*, The Haymarket Series (London: Verso, 1990) 1. For a thoroughgoing critique of this approach, see also Shohat and Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*.

III

Dorothy (Barbara O. Jones) is the jobless mother of one adolescent daughter, Luann (Susan Williams). Her husband, it is suggested, was killed in Vietnam. Her new partner, T.C. (Johnny Weathers), who is also a veteran, cannot find work. The family survives on the meager check Dorothy receives from welfare. The family's objective circumstances change when T.C. is detained by the police on the morning of his new job, falsely accused of a crime he could not have committed. Shortly afterwards, Dorothy learns that she is pregnant and must decide whether to have the abortion that her social worker insists on. While the plot covers a span of a few weeks in Dorothy's life between T.C.'s incarceration and her decision not to abort the fetus, most of the film's screen time is taken up with inner images—memories, daydreams, projections—that interlace, without regard to chronology, events from the previous few months with scenes from daily life replayed hours, perhaps days, later in Dorothy's mind's eye. The film's narration is restricted, focalized entirely through Dorothy. And although the camera treats the images in her head objectively—there are few instances of visual perceptual subjectivity (though many of aural perceptual subjectivity)—most of the sequences are disordered visual and aural memory-fragments. The viewer has privileged access to Dorothy's consciousness, but importantly, we only have access to what she has—reliably, it is suggested—absorbed from the world, and not to her efforts to order that data, at least not until the very end of the film when she narrates a letter to T.C. outlining all that she has learned.

Gerima's allegorical style gives us iconic, extreme close up shots of Dorothy's head and face as she pensively stares out from the barred windows of her apartment. The visual metaphor suggests, at once, Dorothy's imprisonment by so-called free society and the constriction of her consciousness, which at this point in the film, has not made sense of the contradictory ideas knocking about, each with its identifiable source. Dorothy is a cipher. When we first encounter her she is like a blank slate—walking home from the welfare office in the Watts neighborhood of Los Angeles overwhelmed by the chaos of the city's streets with its traffic, its advertisements, its density, overwhelmed by the memory of a police shooting outside the welfare office, by the welfare bureaucrat's condescension, by the endless forms and surveys, and by the creeping recollection of the pedantic injunctions of friends, strangers, bureaucrats, her lover, etc. In this period of

external and material stress—her sweetheart in prison, her purse snatched by a child, her pregnancy, her ongoing unemployment—Dorothy experiences anew the heterogeneity of voices of the community.

There is T.C. who, having become radicalized in prison, writes Dorothy letters, which she imagines him reciting from his cell: “People who love money are vicious animals... A people whose main principle is money by any means necessary is dangerous...The fact that we are subjected to slavery in all its many faces is a direct result of money lovers, usually Europeans, though now you find non-whites imitating love money pioneers.” T.C.’s letters suggest his adoption of Black Panther Party politics.⁴⁴ There is Angi (Renna Kraft), Luann’s teenage tutor, who is being groomed as a local activist and embraces an internationalist Third Worldist position committed to historical analogy and modern world-system analysis: “Today, I teach you history [...] Us black folks are found all over the world. And there are many people angry at them white folks for what they did. But I bet if all us mad folks unite like the Indians, Chicanos, the blacks, the Asians we shape up them white folks and they have to act differently. But you know, the brother at the demonstration said it was a long process, a long process...” There is Molly (Cora Lee Day), Dorothy’s close friend who drinks too much. Upon seeing the poster of an Angolan national liberation fighter with a gun in one hand and baby on her hip hanging in Dorothy’s apartment (a “decoration” brought by Angi), Molly bursts out laughing: “Girl, what is that? I ain’t never seen nothing so funny in all my life. That nappy headed baby and the broad with the gun. Don’t tell me them niggers is going crazy over there in Africa.” There is the raving man Dorothy encounters at the bus stop, the self-described “prince of Dahomey” (Bob Ogburn Jr.): “Just the other day, I had thrown for me a dinner party, right here in niggertown, one of them finest restaurants in niggertown. They served me prince food [...] They had a liqueur from the red sea for me to wash down my prince food... You don’t believe I’m a prince. Here, look into my eyes. You’ll see the stars of Dahomey.”

⁴⁴ One perhaps anomalous shot has T.C. presumably lying on his prison cot reading Langston Hughes’ 1963 book of short stories, *Something in Common*. This may seem like odd reading material considering the consistent character of T.C.’s rhetoric. But I do not think the function of this short shot is to link Harlem Renaissance literature with anti-capitalist political rhetoric. The shot is crosscut with a scene of Dorothy, on her bed (like T.C.), contemplating a political poster of an Angolan guerrilla fighting for national liberation carrying a child in one arm and a gun in the other. The editing goes back and forth between Dorothy and T.C., slipping in a clear shot of the title of T.C.’s book. Is it Dorothy and the Angolan freedom fighter that have “something in common”? Is it T.C. and Dorothy that have “something in common”? Is it Black Arts and Black Power that have “something in common”? I am inclined to think that the book title operates more as a kind of subliminal textual message than as a symbolic one; the point is not the content of Hughes’ book but just its title. The short story for which the book is named is about two Americans—one black man from the north, one white man from the south—who meet in a bar in Hong Kong. They have a fight about race and soon get thrown out of the bar by a British guy. Their nationalism (what they have in common) kicks in and they reenter the bar to teach the Brit a lesson.

There is the radio program peddling mind-over-matter self-help antidotes: “You always become whatever you’re fascinated with and here again is the law of mind. If you’re fascinated with poverty, you’ll become poor....” There is the black social worker (Bettie J. Wilson) that visits Dorothy’s apartment, condescendingly chastising her for having an empty liquor bottle in the living room and threatening to discontinue her state support if Dorothy refuses to go through with an abortion. Finally, there is Simmi (Simmi Ella Nelson), the owner of the local bar/restaurant, whose analysis is the most cohesive and resonant. Simmi’s lecture to her son, who is wearing a fez and African dress, is suggestive of Maulana Karenga’s Kawaïda philosophy and its seven principles of blackness (Nguzo Saba): unity (Umoja), self-determination (Kujichagulia), collective work and responsibility (Ujima), purpose (Nia), Kĩimba (creativity), faith (Imani).⁴⁵ Simmi insists on the four requisite achievements in order to effect change in the community: togetherness (by which she seems to mean black unity and not the nonwhite unity that Angi advocates), bodies (she advises Dorothy not to abort her fetus because of the demographic challenges of minority groups), calculation (i.e. a plan) to which she opposes the promiscuous violence of individual actions (“You know I could get me a gun and go out there and on top of one of them hills in Hollywood and rip me off some of them white freaks... [But] that’s not good enough. That’s not what we want.”), and lastly, historical knowledge (“You know, the thing that really, really makes me sad is we don’t have enough awareness about our past folks... And we need to know these things.”).

⁴⁵ In 1965, in the wake of the Malcolm X’s assassination and the Watts rebellion, Karenga founded the cultural nationalist US organization headquartered in Los Angeles. Although the organization probably never exceeded five or six hundred members, its influence on black activism in the Black Power era was significant. Karenga’s organization developed a semi-religious (though anti-Christian) philosophy based on a creation story that incorporates elements of African religions, in particular Zulu theology, that turns to Kiswahili (widely spoken language in Africa) as a semi-official language, that incorporates African rituals. Within the black nationalist community, the strife between cultural nationalism and revolutionary nationalism took on concrete form in the actual conflicts between the US organization and the Black Panther Party. Between 1968 and 1970 these entities vied for “dominance in the public sphere—from community meetings and street corners to college campuses” (Brown 88). The conflict culminated in the deaths of two Panthers—Alprentice “Bunchy” Carter and John Huggins—at the hands of US members after a contentious argument during a student meeting about the directorship of a new Black Studies program at UCLA turned violent. US’s influence declined in the early 1970s as a result of the conflict with the Panthers, State repression, internal strife, and Karenga’s conviction and incarceration for assault and false imprisonment of two female US members in 1971. Karenga was released from prison in 1975, at which time he re-entered nationalist politics with “an updated Kawaïda theory, void of its quasi-religious emphasis and redefined as a secularized ideology of social change based on pan-African, nationalist, and socialist thought” (Brown 129). For a sympathetic history of the US organization, see Brown, *Fighting for Us: Maulana Karenga, the Us Organization, and Black Cultural Nationalism*.

IV

While recent scholars agree that political violence is indeed at the heart of *Bush Mama*, they largely disagree about its role in the film.⁴⁶ Much of the disagreement centers around *Bush Mama*'s relation to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*—the L.A. School's commonly noted inspiration. The disagreement largely turns on two questions: first, the extent to which the film's analogy between the colonial subject and the black internal colonial subject—in other words, between the national liberation struggles against colonial powers and African American armed revolt against the American state—is a valid one. If the analogy is not apt, then *Bush Mama*'s account of violence cannot fit comfortably within the Fanonian framework that gives it some of its theoretical authority and legitimacy. Second, there is a question about whether the film understands its own contemporary moment as one that precedes the onset of anti-colonial violence, or, as itself a period of struggle. Fanon makes a distinction between these two moments in order to emphasize the rupture of anti-colonial struggle—the way in which participation in the struggle transforms consciousness and lays the foundation for *new* politics and culture.

In her recent book, *Soul Power*, Cynthia Young has tried to problematize the Fanonian reading of the two seminal L.A. School films, *Bush Mama* and *Killer of Sheep*, by suggesting that rather than illustrating a Fanonian insight about revolutionary violence in the U.S. context, they address a lacuna in Fanon. Young argues that if Fanon imagines that the revolutionary subject is formed in the *midst* of anti-colonial struggle, he fails to fully account for the *advent* of the struggle for decolonization. Young asks, “What precipitates that Hegelian act of violence, the decisive struggle between slave and master, that will produce the historical struggle?”⁴⁷ Fanon, Young suggests, vaguely turns to the “revolutionary intellectual” who forges links with mass organizations and who plays a critical role in the advent of struggle. But the problem persists: How are we to understand the emergence of the revolutionary intellectual? What produces his consciousness? Young argues that this is the aporia in Fanon that the seminal films of the L.A. Rebellion, *Bush Mama* and *Killer of Sheep*, address: namely, they try to account for “...how that formation [revolutionary intellectual class] might

⁴⁶ See Wilderson III, *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*; Young, *Soul Power : Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left*.

⁴⁷ Young, *Soul Power : Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left* 228.

help mobilize themselves and the masses in the period that might be termed pre-revolutionary.”⁴⁸ Perhaps we should first say that Young overstates both the intellectual’s role in Fanon’s analysis (which is less top down than suggested here) and his role in Gerima and Burnett’s films. For if we could comfortably say that these films are about consciousness, the subjects of consciousness—Dorothy, a welfare mother (in *Bush Mama*), and Stan, a slaughterhouse worker (in *Killer of Sheep*)—are surely neither the “revolutionary intellectuals” Fanon describes nor even the organic intellectuals that Young imagines them to be; they represent the mass subject that must be mobilized. Still, Young has put her finger on a real difficulty in Fanon: the revolutionary subject in Fanon—that is, the subject formed in the *process* of struggle—is necessarily temporally displaced and ontologically distinct from the subject that *first* enters into struggle, that “precipitates that Hegelian act of violence.” The consciousness of the first subject cannot be the same as the consciousness of the second, and yet without this (imperfect? mixed?) consciousness of the first, the decolonization effort could not have gotten under way. *Bush Mama*, thus, may be said to give an account of that “pre-revolutionary” mass subject arriving at a mixed consciousness that corresponds to the immediate pre-history of struggle.⁴⁹

In *Bush Mama*, culture will play a role just as it does in Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth*. Yet, as we will see, its role is ambiguous as is the film’s deployment of Fanon. The relation between revolutionary violence and national culture is taken up by Fanon, but Fanon’s sometimes obscure statements contribute to the difficulty of specifying *Bush Mama*’s relation to Fanon. If Fanon was adamant that national culture does not, in any real sense, pre-exist decolonization struggle, he was less so about rejecting the positive role for culture in the “pre-revolutionary” period. On the one hand, past national culture, after a few centuries of exploitation, had become a “a set of automatic habits, some traditions of dress, and few broken-down institutions.”⁵⁰ All this belongs to colonized man. Meanwhile, decolonization struggle “does not give back to the national culture its former value and shape; this struggle which aims at a fundamentally different set of relations between men cannot leave intact either the form or the content of the people’s culture.”⁵¹ For

⁴⁸ Ibid. 229.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1965) 238.

⁵¹ Ibid. 246.

Fanon, while perhaps a historical necessity, the turn to a past national culture is ultimately a blind alley: it can neither take the place of struggle (for “you do not show the proof of your nation from its culture” rather “you substantiate its existence in the fight which the people wage against the forces of occupation”)⁵² nor is it the dynamic, elastic, living culture that will proceed decolonization. On the other hand, Fanon does not entirely dismiss past national culture, granting a kind of affective importance: “The claim to a national culture in the past does not only rehabilitate that nation and serve as a justification for the hope of a future national culture. In the sphere of psycho-affective equilibrium it is responsible for an important change in the native.”⁵³ What sort of change? One important for *entry* into struggle? We encounter a lacuna in Fanon: what is the possible instrumental role for the turn to past national culture? Could it serve as a means to the end of national liberation? While Fanon is largely silent on this question, this question is central in *Bush Mama*.

Moreover, the L.A. School demonstrates a distinct interest in culture that ultimately departs from Fanon’s more skeptical treatment. For if the L.A. School was focused on consciousness in the “pre-revolutionary” period, its consciousness-raising tool of choice has seemed to many commentators to be “pre-revolutionary” national culture. But, Young asks “If one takes this [Fanonian] reading seriously, then how might we understand the UCLA filmmakers’ project of cultural excavation, their use of music, dance, and spiritual traditions to anchor a black oppositional identity?”⁵⁴ This archaeological impulse is apparent in important L.A. Rebellion films like Larry Clark’s *Passing Through* and Julie Dash’s *Daughters of Dust*, which turn to jazz music and Gullah culture, respectively. Even Charles Burnett’s *Killer of Sheep* relies heavily on an African American musical tradition and on African American folklore. While paradigmatic of the school, in some ways, *Bush Mama* is actually anomalous in this regard: it is the L.A. School film least involved in the work of cultural excavation and thereby seemingly most allied with Fanon. And yet, as I will try to show, the ambiguity surrounding Dorothy’s adoption of plaits at the end of the film indicates a certain tension in the film between cultural excavation and revolutionary violence à la Fanon.

⁵² Ibid. 223.

⁵³ Ibid. 210.

⁵⁴ Young, *Soul Power: Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left* 230.

V

At the end of *Bush Mama*, Dorothy dictates a letter to T.C. The final five minutes of the film leading up to this letter constitute a formal break with what has come before. I dwell on these final moments of *Bush Mama* because in this last sequence and the letter-reciting epilogue that follows, the film reveals its ambiguities and contradictions. A pregnant Dorothy is being forced to sign a statement confessing to the killing of a police officer (Chris Clay) who she caught raping her daughter. Her refusal results in a severe beating. She is filmed in a prison cell, writhing in pain as she miscarries. This scene is intercut with the temporally prior sequence in which Luann is first questioned on the street by a police officer as she waits for Dorothy to return from her first day at a new job; then led by the officer into her apartment and handcuffed to Dorothy's bed; then raped by the officer; then discovered by her mother, who kills the officer with her umbrella. Each moment in this high contrast sequence is crosscut with Dorothy miscarrying in her prison cell. This is the first sequence of the film whose perspective is ambiguous. It cannot be Dorothy's memory because she could not have been present to witness the events. It seems unlikely that the scene is a phantasm that Dorothy conjures up as she writhes in pain on the cell floor for the scenes are too information-packed and unequivocal (though it is true that the audio track of Luann screaming "mama" as she is being raped echoes softly over the images of Dorothy in the cell).

This sequence appears to be the film's first objective flashback. And it makes sense that it would be cast as not springing from Dorothy's imagination, for the film has a stake in establishing beyond a doubt the truth of this account. The audio track loops the alternating voice of the social worker from earlier asking in a condescending tone "Do you understand?" and the voice of another bureaucrat "Do you agree?" in what feel like boomeranging questions addressed as much to the audience as the authorities. This audio loop is combined with the reading of an "official report" that accuses Dorothy of having pulled down the officer's pants to simulate rape. But the objectivity of the entire flashback beginning with Luann talking to the officer and ending with Dorothy walking in on the rape—which is filmed as a long shot with all three actors consistently in the frame (it has no point of view shots)—suggests that the sequence is not focalized through Dorothy, that it is wholly reliable and objective, a true account of the events leading up to the killing. Let

there be no mistake, the film suggests, this is not a he said, she said impasse; rather, it is the conflict between the state's lies and the film's truth (made possible by filmic realism). One imagines that this carefully-made distinction—in some sense out of character for a film interested in perception—owes to the squeamishness of spectators who care about police officer's guilt, spectators for whom Dorothy's act is admissible only as direct revenge, vigilante justice, imposed on the actual perpetrator and not on a homologous surrogate.

Film scholar Frank Wilderson argues that to include the rape—much less to narratively establish its actuality—betrays an incongruity between *Bush Mama's* formal features and its script that is indicative of a political failing: “Even in Haile Gerima's *Bush Mama*, one gets the sense that whereas Burnett's cinematography and Gerima's editing and acoustic innovation acknowledge the gratuitousness of violence that structures the chaos of Black life..., the screenplay, on the other hand, insists on contingent and commonsense notions of police brutality and therefore is only willing or able to identify policing in the spectacle of police violence (e.g., Luann being raped) and not in the everyday banality of ordinary White existence.”⁵⁵ And later,

In other words, the script *needs* the “event” of police brutality as a justification for Black on White violence. Whereas the cinematic form is content with a structural and ontological argument for Black on White violence (for instance, the repetition of the stabs and the camera's fascination with that repetition), the narrative can only meet the form halfway. The script requires the moral and juridical persuasion of the “event” of police brutality... The script thus responds to and imagines White on Black violence as though such violence was individuated and contingent; as though it had everything to do with the police in Compton, and nothing to do with White women burning bras in Harvard Square; and as though it were not structural and gratuitous.⁵⁶

In other words, for Wilderson, the film casts Dorothy's act too much in the mold of revenge, reciprocity—and not in the Fanonian vein of revolutionary violence that does not require an “event” for its ignition.

⁵⁵ Wilderson III, *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* 178.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.* 182.

The “cinematic form” of the particular scene (Dorothy killing the officer) that Wilderson cites—by its very symmetry to the rape sequence before it, by its repetition of the stabbing—implies reciprocity. This scene bears closer examination as it raises a number of questions about *Bush Mama’s* treatment of political violence. There is an important shift within this scene that is marked by a dissolve. When Dorothy walks in on the rape, she is wearing her wig. She lunges toward the officer and descends on him with her umbrella. He is positioned between Dorothy and Luann, his body extended horizontally across the bed, in almost the same the position he trapped Luann, who he handcuffed to the end of the bed. After the dissolve, Dorothy is wearing braids; the officer is positioned vertically with his head at the head of the bed; Dorothy is straddled over him, repeatedly jabbing him with the end of her umbrella; a poster produced by the *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (MPLA) featuring the image of a female Angolan national liberation fighter with a rifle in one arm and a child in the other hangs on the wall over the bed frame.⁵⁷

There are a few things to notice about this scene. First, the repositioning of the officer’s body, the repeated thrusts of the umbrella, and Dorothy’s concomitant grunts, suggest that they are engaged in sex, or perhaps more accurately, that Dorothy is raping the officer. Dorothy does not merely kill the officer; she reciprocates his violence. Frank Wilderson has noted that the formal symmetry between the officer’s rape and Dorothy’s rape:

There is a correspondence between the intimacy of the policeman’s violence and the intimacy of Dorothy’s murder of him [...] Dorothy does not blow the officer away with multiple rounds of an automatic weapon, but crawls on top of him—as he had been on top of her daughter—and stabs him to death with the blunt point of her umbrella. As he has exhausted, relieved, and renewed himself sexually at the expense of her daughter, she now exhausts, relieves, and renewed herself through the repeated thrust of her umbrella. To paraphrase Fanon, the violence cleanses her.⁵⁸

⁵⁷ *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (MPLA) was formed in 1956 as a Marxist party. It began efforts to fight the Portuguese colonial government in 1961 and fought until Angolan independence was won in 1975.

⁵⁸ Wilderson III, *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* 159.

Furthermore, the cleansing has taken place below the MPLA poster, as if blessed by it, in much the way the crucifix above the conjugal bed blesses the procreative act. Second, what are we to make of Dorothy's braids? We know from the previous shot, the objective flashback, that when Dorothy discovered Luann being raped she was wearing the wig. The shot that follows the dissolve cannot be part of the objective flashback; it represents the film's symbolic rendition of Dorothy's act. In the order of events, Dorothy kills the police officer and then dispenses with her wig that has come to signify Euro-American cultural imposition (figure 19). This action will take on primary importance in Dorothy's final voice-over. But in the post-dissolve, symbolic account, the order is reversed: she has already dispensed with the wig when she kills the officer.



Figure 19. Dorothy (Barabara O. Jones) killing the police officer (Chris Clay). *Bush Mama* (1976). She wears a wig as she rushes toward the officer, but she wears braids as she kills him (beneath the MPLA poster).

At the core of the film is a question about what constitutes the revolutionary act: the killing of the police officer or the removal of the wig. After Dorothy kills the police officer, she then rearranges Luann's dress, stands up from the bed, out of breath, to address the camera directly. The letter Dorothy dictates at this point refers to events that occur after the rape—her beating by the police, her miscarriage—but the actual dictation of the letter occurs in the same space and time as the killing of the police officer. Surely the letter could have been dictated from the prison cell or the final events of the film could have been presented linearly rather than as objective flashbacks. But by this sleight, the film can conjoin the moment of

consciousness, of agency, the film's denouement, with the act of enunciation that is implied by Dorothy's letter. Moreover, although the letter that Dorothy narrates does not mention the killing of the police officer, the act—because it occurs in the same space—hovers over the film's epilogue, raising a question about what sort of consciousness, agency, Dorothy has achieved by her violent redress, and furthermore whether this act was the telos of her evolving consciousness. For, how can we escape the echo of Simmi's prior disavowal of individual, random acts of violence: "You know I could get me a gun and go out there on the top of one them hills in Hollywood and rip me off some of them white freaks...Would that do any good? That's not big enough. That's not good enough. That's not what we want... We want a big hunk of Uncle Sam's pie." Is Dorothy's act "big enough"? Its privileged status in the film's ending would suggest the opposite: that the act is indeed "big enough" and by itself constitutes a breakthrough for Dorothy's consciousness. But the film's final moments in which Dorothy dictates a letter summarizing the changes in her consciousness complicates this reading.

Before freezing on Dorothy's face for the declamation of her letter to T.C., the image rack focuses back and forth between a poster of an Angolan freedom fighter—a young woman in braids holding a child in one arm and a gun in the other—and a tight close-up of Dorothy's face, directly addressed to the camera, her lips still, her hair in braids, the catch light of her eyes obscured by the shadows the braids cast (figure 21). The visual analogy seems unmistakable: the Angolan militant of the *Movimento Popular de Libertação de Angola* (MPLA) fights the colonial imposition of Portugal, one of the last colonial powers to be officially dislodged from Africa, while her North American counterpart takes up the struggle against internal colonialism. This analogy was also suggested in an earlier sequence in which extreme close-ups of Dorothy's eyes are intercut with extreme close-ups of the eyes of the MPLA woman in the poster (figure 20).⁵⁹ In that sequence, the suggestion was that Dorothy *identified* with the woman—they were literally making eye contact and the framing of the shots reinforces this reading. The identification imagined was one-sided (coming from Dorothy) and ultimately subjective; she saw "something in common."

⁵⁹ One interesting feature of this earlier sequence is that the close-ups on the poster seem to reveal a streaming tear in the MPLA fighter's eye. I doubt this was in the original poster, and I cannot say I have a hypothesis about what it might mean in this context. It adds sentiment in a film that, for the most part, eschews melodramatic displays.



Figure 20. Dorothy and the MPLA fighter make eye contact. *Bush Mama* (1976)



Figure 21. The last shot of *Bush Mama* (1976)

The last shot of the film (and its last frame), because it has both women facing the same direction (rather than each other)—both directly addressing the camera—suggests that the analogy between them is objective, posited by film, and undeniable. What remains to be established—an open question—is whether we, the audience, will make eye contact, whether we will return the gaze, whether we will (subjectively) identify with them.

The ending's voice-over is less straightforward; it is rife with puzzling, contradictory injunctions. These contradictions challenge the obviousness of the visual analogy described above. In the final voice-over, after reporting the recent events—her miscarriage induced by a severe police beating—Dorothy summarizes what she's learned over the course of the film, namely that she is not to blame for her precarious situation, her poverty and powerlessness; that her "problem" is the place she was born into, "a place with laws that protect the people that got money"; and that things need to change. But the change that Dorothy subsequently elaborates is not rebellion, what she did when she killed the policeman who was raping her daughter, or guerilla warfare, what the MPLA fighter in the poster behind her represents, or even political organizing, exactly. Instead, she embraces a preliminary step, a turning inward: "I have to get to know myself. To read and to study. We all have to, so we can change it, so we can know how to talk to each other." But what is it to get to know oneself? What is it that must be read and studied? And who is the relevant "we"? We should read the injunction "to get to know myself" as a collective one in which "myself" stands in for "my people" and in which "I" stands in for "we" and in which "we" implies the black internal colony. While her letter suggests the need for consciousness-raising, it also suggests that the consciousness that needs to be raised is a historical consciousness—a consciousness of "our" past—just as "knowing myself" entails "knowing where I came from." We change things by knowing ourselves first, not by participating in armed struggle.

If Dorothy's first recommendation concerns the content of consciousness-raising, the second strategic recommendation of the letter concerns the form of consciousness-raising: "Talking to each other is not easy. I know you in jail T.C. and angry, but most of the time I don't understand your letters. Talk to me easy T.C. cause I want to understand. It's not easy to win over people like me. There's a lot of people like me

and we have many things to fight for just to live. But the idea is win over more of our people. Talk the same talk but easy T.C.” This bit of the letter raises several problems. First, among the film’s competing political discourses, it seems to privilege T.C.’s. But there is reason to believe that up until this point T.C. has not embodied the film’s politics. The letter suggests that Dorothy’s consciousness has been most directly affected by T.C.’s letters, full of nuggets of wisdom that have been transmitted from on high. Mike Murashige, in the most detailed examination of *Bush Mama* to date, argues that T.C.’s preachy letters have a decreasing effect on Dorothy—which Gerima indicates by his choice of camera angles—as they move from speaking *to* her to speaking *at* her. Murashige claims that the film suggests that T.C.’s discourse—though perhaps “true”—“cannot adequately speak of or to Dorothy’s [distinctly female] experiences or, by itself, provide sufficient tools for resistance.”⁶⁰ On the contrary, for Murashige, no single discourse can adequately address Dorothy’s situation; it is the accretion of the multiple narratives that the film itself showcases that can make sense of her experience. After all, the film has carefully detailed the evolution of Dorothy’s consciousness, which has been variously affected by the drudgery of her daily life as well as her encounters with individuals and institutions—the social worker, the welfare office, the police, Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) “therapy” sessions,⁶¹ her friend Molly, her daughter’s tutor Angie, and especially Simmi. If *Bush Mama* has systematically avoided legitimating certain discourses over others (T.C.’s over Simmi’s or Angie’s), how are we to understand Dorothy’s privileging of T.C.’s talk at the end of the film? Is this a sign of Dorothy’s ongoing false consciousness? Or is it meant to single out T.C.’s discourse for masculinist bias and/or gendered tone deafness? If this is the case, to cast the complaint about T.C.’s talk as a matter of too much difficulty seems overly deferential and risks casting Dorothy as not up to the task—as deficient rather than different.

Another related problem suggested by Dorothy’s letter has direct bearing on film as a medium of consciousness-raising: Dorothy raises a question about the film’s own form. For, *Bush Mama* is itself no easy film. Certainly her complaint about the difficulty of T.C.’s letters apply to the film itself; the film stubbornly

⁶⁰ Murashige, “Haile Gerima and the Political Economy of Cinematic Resistance,” 196.

⁶¹ In a footnote, Murashige suggests that an early sequence in *Bush Mama* in which Dorothy participates in some kind of meeting and various participants accuse her of drinking in secret is an AFDC gathering. See Ibid. 202.

does not “talk easy.” The complex layering of sound and image, the non-linear narrative, the expressive editing betray *Bush Mama*’s high modernist aesthetics. If Dorothy’s plea is addressed to the black nationalist intelligentsia, we cannot avoid the sense that it is addressed to Gerima himself in a kind of reflexive self-reproach.

It may be worth questioning at this point whether Dorothy is indeed a reliable narrator, whether in fact her final voice-over reflects not the achievement of self-consciousness, but her ongoing “false consciousness.” Such a reading has been implicitly suggested by Cynthia Young, who writes, “Gerima’s *Bush Mama*, however, holds out the hope that Dorothy and T.C. represent the beginning of an emergent social order that can be of eventual political use...Gerima’s use of surrealism and straight narrative, though, does present a ruptured style, one that may in fact undercut Dorothy’s seamless trajectory toward liberation. Is her letter at the end just another hallucination?”⁶² But I wonder whether it is less the film’s non-linear style (and I do not think the surrealism label apt) that suggests this reading of the ending than the puzzling content of the letter. Reading Dorothy’s letter as hallucination or false consciousness would constitute a reading against the grain. Furthermore, it would destabilize the consensus that understands Gerima and the L.A. School to be activist political filmmakers using cinema as a tool for community consciousness-raising.⁶³

The last bit of Dorothy’s letter takes another, perhaps surprising, turn as it transitions from the importance of popular audience reception (i.e. talk easy so I can understand) to the meager pay-off of effective message transmission: Dorothy’s removal of her wig. “You remember you used to ask why I always wear a wig. All day and all night, when I eat, when I sleep. T.C., the wig is off my head; the wig is off my head. I never saw what was under it. I just saw on top—the glitter, the wig. The wig is off my head T.C.” This final bit of voice-over inflects the earlier prescription—“I have to get to know myself. To read and to study”—with a new sense of embodiment, a literalness: my body, my self. While the rack focus between Dorothy and the MPLA fighter at first suggested a structural analogy between Dorothy and the MPLA

⁶² See Young, *Soul Power : Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left* 244.

⁶³ Gerima affirms his activist orientation when he writes, “While Hollywood produces by and large escapist spectacle, commercial and emotionally exploitative cinema, independent cinema, hopefully, produces a rational, pedagogical alternative that seeks to meet the particular needs of the community” (quoted in James, 328). See James, *The Most Typical Avant-Garde : History and Geography of Minor Cinemas in Los Angeles*; Haile Gerima, “Triangular Cinema, Breaking Toys, and Dinkesh Vs Lucy,” *Questions of Third Cinema*, ed. Jim Pines and Paul Willeman (London: BFI Publishing, 1989).

figure—both occupy comparable positions within their respective societies and both recognize the need to take up arms against the colonial power, by the end of her voice-over the visual analogy appears more equivocal. The parallel was initially established, on the one hand, by both figures' direct address to the camera and, on the other hand, by their braids.⁶⁴ The later voice-over suggests, however, that the object of Dorothy's imitation is not the gun but the braids, that the end of her newly achieved consciousness is a "natural" hairstyle. But does hair figure at all for the MPLA fighter in the poster? If the gun signifies her physical struggle and if the child in her arms signifies the historic nature of her struggle, do her braids signify at all? Or are they just as accidental to her (and the propagandist) as her blouse? Dorothy has, in a sense, read the poster against its grain, transforming the braids into the most potent signifier of all. This raises the question of whether Gerima is substituting braids (a signifier of cultural nationalism) for the gun (a signifier of revolutionary nationalism) or whether, more charitably, he glosses over what he grasps as a two-step process in which donning braids is a prerequisite for everything/anything else. What seems indisputable is that for the MPLA fighter and the propagandist who created the poster, the braids constitute neither a preliminary step toward armed struggle nor a replacement for it—the prominence of hair is a purely U.S. addition. For *Bush Mama*, it turns out that the Third World Liberation comparison is only so useful. In this ambiguous ending, we encounter the fight between revolutionary black nationalism and cultural nationalism, a debate that had raged in the late 1960s and early 1970s. But by placing hair (in a sense) at the center of *Bush Mama*, Gerima

⁶⁴ Frank Wilderson has also argued, for different reasons, that the Dorothy and the woman in the MPLA poster are not really analogous figures. His argument hinges on a rejection of the internal colonialism framework, though for none of the standard reasons discussed in the previous chapter. For Wilderson, the postcolonial's violence is ultimately aimed at the restoration of land; it is about, in Fanon's parlance, putting the settler "out of the picture." Meanwhile, the black diasporic descendent of slaves—a figure that Wilderson designates by the term "Slave"—suffers an absolute "psychic vulnerability," one that "cartographic restoration" (i.e. the restoration of land) cannot mitigate. The Slave's "guarantee of restoration [is] predicated on her/his need to put the Human out of the picture" (155)—that is, to end the world as we know it. Thus, for Wilderson the widespread application of Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth* to *Bush Mama* (and other films featuring comparable narratives defending revolutionary violence in internal colonial contexts) is a convenient failure of reading. Fanonian readings—by assimilating the case of the "postcolonial" to the exceptional case of the "Slave"—provided a useful alibi: "the slave might project his/her violent desire, cinematically, in a manner that could be understood and perhaps appreciated by spectators who were not Slaves" (153). What remains unclear in Wilderson's analysis is how *Bush Mama* signals the ontological distinction that Wilderson maintains between the Slave (Dorothy) and the postcolonial (the figure in the MPLA poster), and furthermore, how it establishes the exceptionalism of the Slave's violence. While Wilderson acknowledges that the Fanonian analogy is the one embraced consciously by Gerima and thus has no use for the language of intention, his methodology still seems to require some form of textual evidence. Otherwise, the argument would be one in which violence in films by "Slave filmmakers"—by virtue of the identity of their authors alone—necessarily confirm the exceptionalism of the violence of "an object who possesses no contemporaries" (i.e. the "Slave"), "an epistemological violence unaccompanied by the psychic grounding wires of postcolonial restoration, fantasies anchored by cartography" (155). See Wilderson III, *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*.

muddies the sides in this quarrel. Dorothy's letter's final lines unmistakably complete the film's circle, connecting its ending to its opening and putting hair at the core of its politics.

VI

Bush Mama begins by introducing, one by one, several distinct sound elements in a cacophonous, tension-laden, aural palimpsest: the sound of helicopters overhead that both foreshadow T.C.'s Vietnam war nightmares and that evoke the Watt's rebellion of 1965 that converted an American urban center into the frontlines of an intra-national war; the taut sounds of cars duking it out in a traffic jam; the grating, looping script of a welfare bureaucrat's questionnaire, "Do you and your spouse reside together? Is all or a portion of your spouse's income deposited in a joint checking account, a joint savings accounts, your spouse's separate savings account, turned over for use in your family expenses? Have you ever received non-cash gifts in the form of free rent, free housing, free food, free room and board, free utilities or other household expenses,...?"; a police radio reporting the apprehension of a suspect; another male interviewer rehearsing the same welfare questionnaire, "Do you and your spouse reside together?...." These distinct sound elements are layered over each other, in orchestral fashion, building toward an orgasmic crescendo that gives way to a single musical refrain which coincides with the introduction of the main character, Dorothy, walking down a busy Watts street toward a welfare office. The images that have accompanied the frenzied layering of sound are black and white documentary images of what is perhaps a single, representative street in the Watts ghetto. The shots are unsteady and restless, unmistakably betraying their handheld genesis. The sixteen shots that accompany the delirious sound track focus on a few city blocks, capturing it variously from across the street in long shot pans and in medium handheld tracking shots that mimic the perception of someone walking down the sidewalk taking in its bustle of people and advertisements. Six of those sixteen shots feature storefronts that sell wigs or signage on marquees and sidewalk placards advertising wigs ("wear and wash") and other beauty supplies (figure 22).



Figure 22. Wig Signage. *Bush Mama* (1976)

The overwhelming character of the openings' sound track mirrors the chaos of the visual montage with its short shots, its shaky camera, and its meandering gaze. Both sound and image evoke perceptual overload. That the shots of the sidewalk suggest the perspective of someone walking down it looking in at the window displays further suggests the analogy between the camera's gaze and Dorothy's gaze as she too absorbs, visually and aurally, a multiplicity of signs and inputs. Indeed, *Bush Mama's* opening sequence conjures phenomenologically the polyphony of the "voices" in Dorothy's head. The film that follows turns out to be the story of how Dorothy comes to make sense of those discordant messages and to choose sides, so to say. It is significant that the most frequent visual "message" Dorothy receives advertises wigs. The wig, by the end of the film, will come to signify, almost like a synecdoche, the "voices" that Dorothy will disclaim. The inward turn that Dorothy embraces in the film's final voice over ("I have to get to know myself") begins with the removal of her wig.

The symbolic importance of hair in diasporic black communities should not be underestimated. Commenting on the presence in black neighborhoods of so many barbershops and beauty salons, on the abundance of hair-care products, on the explosion of advertising dedicated to their sale, on the "skill and sheer fastidiousness that goes into the styles you can see on the street,"⁶⁵ Kobena Mercer asks "Why so much time, money, energy and worry spent shaping our hair?"⁶⁶ Mercer suggests that the answer is to be found in the peculiar importance of hair in the classification schemes of eighteenth and nineteenth-century scientific

⁶⁵ Kobena Mercer, "Black Hair/Style Politics," *Black British Culture and Society: A Text Reader*, ed. Kwesi Owusu (London: Routledge, 2000) 112.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

racism: “[W]ithin racism’s bipolar codification of human worth, black people’s hair has been historically *devalued* as the most visible stigmata of blackness, second only to skin.”⁶⁷ Struggles over black hair have largely been concerned with valorizing what had been previously devalued. But valorizing the “key ethnic signifier” is not such a straightforward enterprise according to Mercer, precisely because hair—unlike skin pigmentation or facial features or body types—can be changed, styled, worked-up by the labor of human hands. Hair is a cultural raw material, a site for creative expression, and as such any work done on it, which is mostly the case in all human societies, is an index of our human capacity to make worlds.

If the discourses of scientific racism associated non-white peoples with nature rather than culture, the mere recognition that hair, that most seemingly biological of traits, is an important site of cultural production goes some way toward exposing the absurdity of those discourses. But it also suggests how puzzling it is that avengers of black hair in the Black Power era embraced the natural (e.g. the Afro, dreadlocks) and jettisoned the artificial (e.g. straightening). This embrace of the natural evidenced by the valorization of the Afro and Dreadlocks—two hairstyles that owe their forms to the materiality of black hair—was accompanied by an implied link to Africa. The Afro referenced Africa in its very name and Dreadlocks through the Rastafarian recentering of Ethiopia as the “promised land.” This implied link between the natural and Africa thus unwittingly accedes to the nature/culture dichotomy central to European ethnocentric thought that associated Africa with Nature and barbarism and Europe with Culture and civilization.⁶⁸ For Mercer, of course neither the Afro nor dreadlocks are natural or African—both depend on the work of human hands and even on special tools to achieve their effects and both hairstyles were recognized as distinctly diasporic in Africa. Still, Mercer recognizes that the Afro and Dreadlocks operated as a kind of “tactical inversion,” that, while maneuvering within the terms established by Eurocentric thought, sought to claim for “Nature”—and thus for blackness (via the Africa link)—goodness, beauty, and freedom.⁶⁹ Mercer laments that “The counter-hegemonic tactic of inversion appropriated a particularly romanticist version of nature as a means of empowering the black subject; but by remaining within a dualistic logic of oppositionality (to Europe and

⁶⁷ Ibid. 113.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 115-17.

⁶⁹ Ibid. 118.

artifice) the moment of rupture was delimited by the fact that it was only ever an imaginary Africa that was put into play.”⁷⁰ There is a suggestion here that because the Africa invoked by these hairstyles was an imaginary one rather than an historical Africa, the force of the tactic was contained. Mercer suggests that had the preferred hairstyles linked up with something real, an actually existing Africa, an “African approach to the aesthetic” could have provided a real alternative to the “separation of the aesthetic sphere in post-Kantian European thought.”⁷¹ Plaits, in their resemblance to other kinds of African craft forms (e.g. ceramics, architecture, embroidery) would have been a better option, one that reflects a distinctly “African approach to the aesthetic” by incorporating “practices of beautification in everyday life” and by embracing artifice as the “mark of both invention and tradition.”⁷² Mercer does not so much reject the turn to Africa as the source of a counter-hegemonic tactic (for he thinks that African aesthetic forms could indeed provide symbolic resistance), rather, he rejects the turn to a mythological Africa, the same mythological space of nature that Eurocentric thought constructed for its own plundering ends.

If *Bush Mama* centers on the symbolic meanings of hair, it is significant that the opposition is established between the wig that Dorothy wears throughout the film and the plaits that she adopts, in imitation of the MPLA fighter, at the film’s end. While the dichotomy between the artificial (“[t]he wig is off my head. I never saw what was under it. I just saw on top—the *glitter*, the wig”) and the ‘natural’ (“I never saw what was *under it*”) is operative in *Bush Mama*, Gerima has avoided some of the pitfalls suggested by Mercer’s analysis. The wig, unlike straightened hair, is not straightforwardly the unalienated work of human hands—a form of popular art, creative expression. The wig was likely mass-produced in a factory. The plaits that Dorothy adopts forge a link with a real Africa and not a mythological one. Still, if for Mercer plaits signify, not the realm of nature, but a collective creative artistic *practice*, for Gerima the plaits signify a ‘natural’ hairstyle opposed to the glitter (is there anything more artificial?) of the wig whose surface hides what is beneath and essential.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid. 120.

⁷² Ibid.

What does it mean for the film to put hair at the core of its politics? What failure of consciousness does the wig signify? I would argue that by putting hair at the center of the film, Gerima has in effect complicated the spectatorial relation to the violent act. On the one hand Dorothy's act of violence, in terms of the story order, appears to occur prior to the ultimate the act of consciousness—Dorothy's removal of her wig—the ultimate sign of a revalorization of blackness. On the other hand, in the film's symbolic rendering of Dorothy's act, which replays the initial stabbing of the officer with the umbrella (and is marked by a dissolve), Dorothy is represented as already being wig-free, which would suggest that the revalorization of blackness signified by the adoption of braids comes prior, and is necessary, to the revolutionary act of violence. But in either reading, the film has affirmed the relevance of the embrace of blackness whether as a means to an “end”—where the “end” is revolutionary violence—or as itself the “end” of revolutionary violence. These are quite different strategic approaches to the liberation of the internal colony. And neither is particularly Fanonian; for as I have tried to show above, Fanon was deeply skeptical about the role of cultural affirmation in the fight against physical colonialism but also in the fight against mental colonialism and internalized racism.

Furthermore, that it is braids that come to stand-in for the avowal of blackness rather than Africa more explicitly or African American music or plastic arts is suggestive. Could we really say that the embrace of braids indicates a cultural nationalist strain in *Bush Mama*? If we grant Kobena's analysis above, we must contend with the exceptional character of hair as a racial signifier. Like skin color, hair, in scientific racist discourse, has functioned as an important signifier of blackness, a “key ethnic signifier.” But unlike skin color, hair—because it can be worked up by human hands—is a site for cultural expression. That Gerima chooses braids implies an allegiance to African cultural expression rather than to distinctly diasporic hairstyles. Even so, the drama of hair in *Bush Mama* aims to redeem negative images of blackness and thereby fits comfortably with discourses of black nationalism, which have, according to Mercer, “always acknowledged that racism works by encouraging the devaluation of blackness by black subjects themselves, and that a recentering sense

of pride is therefore a prerequisite for a politics of resistance and reconstruction.”⁷³ Despite the prominence of (seemingly) Fanonian revolutionary violence in the film’s narrative, *Bush Mama* subscribes to a politics of transvaluation, which, according to Eddie Glaude, Jr., sought not only to challenge the state but also “maintained that a fundamental psychological and cultural conversion from their [African American] socialization as a subordinate people to a self-determining nation needed to take place.”⁷⁴ Whether the telos of this “revolution of the mind”—or cultural nationalism by another name—is revolutionary struggle, or rather, a sense of pride (e.g. the defeat of internalized racism) remains an open question in *Bush Mama*. To the extent that a politics of transvaluation is very much at issue in *Bush Mama*, we should be tempted to see the actual relevance of *Black Skin, White Masks* over *The Wretched of the Earth*, which has typically been treated as the reference point for this film.

Black Skin, White Masks is one of the most poignant texts exploring the dynamics of internalized racism, the psychological impact of systematic oppression and centuries of cultural imposition. But Fanon expressly rejects the pursuit of pride and self-esteem as a solution to the alienation of the racialized. He writes, “As I begin to recognize that the Negro is the symbol of sin, I catch myself hating the Negro. But then I recognize that I am a Negro. There are two ways out of this conflict. Either I ask others to pay no attention to my skin, or else I want them to be aware of it. I try then to find value for what is bad—since I have unthinkingly conceded that the black man is the color of evil. In order to terminate this neurotic situation, in which I am compelled to choose an unhealthy, conflictual solution, fed on fantasies, hostile, inhuman in short, I have only one solution: to rise above this absurd drama that others have staged around me, to reject the two terms that are equally unacceptable, and, through one human being, to reach out for the universal.”⁷⁵ Along corollary lines, Fanon will disavow racialized history, what Dorothy in *Bush Mama* embraced when she said “I have to get to know myself. To read and to study.” Racialized history, Fanon seems to say, is not a means to an end, a prerequisite for revolt, rather, it is a blind alley. “Those negroes and white men will be disalienated who refuse to let themselves be sealed about in the materialized Tower of the

⁷³ Ibid. 114.

⁷⁴ Glaude, “Introduction: Black Power Revisited.”

⁷⁵ Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967) 197.

Past. For many other Negroes, in other ways, disalienation will come into being through their refusal to accept the present as definitive. I am a man, and what I have to recapture is the whole past of the world. I am not responsible solely for the revolt in Santo Domingo. Every time a man has contributed to the victory of the dignity of the spirit, every time a man has said no to an attempt to subjugate his fellows, I have felt solidarity with his act. In no way should I derive my basic purpose from the past of the peoples of color. In no way should I dedicate myself to the revival of an unjustly unrecognized Negro civilization. I will not make myself the man of any past. I do not want to exalt the past at the expense of my present and of my future. It is not because the Indo-Chinese has discovered a culture of his own that his is in revolt. It is because “quite simply” it was, in more than one way, becoming impossible for him to breathe.”⁷⁶

If *Bush Mama* undeniably takes up the problematic of internal colonialism adumbrated in *Black Skin, White Masks*, its proposed solution to Dorothy’s alienation turns out ultimately to depart from Fanon’s Universalism in its loose mixing of cultural and revolutionary nationalism.

VII

Bush Mama stands in sharp contrast to the other seminal film of the L.A. Rebellion, *Killer of Sheep*. *Killer of Sheep* bears mention because its contrast with *Bush Mama* will help further specify the latter’s peculiar political commitments. The differences between these two films have less to do with the often noted more Marxist revolutionary orientation of Gerima and the more culturalist orientation of Burnett. After all, both films display variants of cultural nationalist politics. Rather, in what follows I would like to focus on how the filmmakers handle popular consciousness in the pre-revolutionary moment. I contend that because of Burnett’s more populist attitude toward the average person he could not make a coming to consciousness film like Gerima’s *Bush Mama*, which depends on an elitist conception of a popular consciousness that needs shepherding from above.

The characters in *Killer of Sheep*—Stan, the slaughterhouse worker, and his wife—are not ciphers like Dorothy, nor do they arrive at what we might call “consciousness” by the end of the film. Burnett’s

⁷⁶ Ibid. 226.

distanced, objective style renders characters that have inner lives, ideas in their heads, but our access to their interiority is blocked. The characters are inarticulate, in some ways like Dorothy, and it is often the soundtrack that mediates for them. But while Gerima tries to suggest something of the heterogeneity of the “foreign” voices in an average black welfare mother’s head—in other words, of the content of her false consciousness—, Burnett refuses the knowability of his characters’ minds and thereby refuses the framework of false consciousness altogether. Burnett insists on his characters’ interiority as a fact, but does not attempt to expose its contours.

To say that *Killer of Sheep* is not a film about the ideas in people’s heads is perhaps not quite right either. After all, the conceit of the film depends on an impossible dilemma between thought and action. Stan is a workingman—all day he works in a slaughterhouse herding, bleeding, dismembering sheep. But what happens to the killer of sheep when he suddenly cannot fall asleep, when he suffers from insomnia? Stan’s friend jokingly advises him to count sheep. Should he imagine in his mind’s eye an idyllic pastoral scene—green meadows, blue sky, a herd of sheep—in which he, the herder, count the obedient sheep as they hop over a fence?⁷⁷

But how can the killer of sheep by day count sheep by night? Counting sheep and killing sheep correspond to two different, temporally distinct animal production regimes: the former to family farming and artisanal slaughtering, the latter to commercial farming and industrial slaughter.⁷⁸ Although Stan has a sense of the anachronism of an expression (“counting sheep”) that has outlasted its intelligibility, it is suggested that for him it is not entirely of another world and time. After all, Stan retains a biographical and affective link to the pastoral scene of the insomniac’s fantasy. He has migrated from the rural South, bringing with him to Watts a distinctly countrified sensibility. He has a robust sense of metaphor and poetry, perhaps even

⁷⁷ The OED traces the association of “counting sheep” with getting to sleep only as far back as 1854, when Seba Smith, an American humorist based in Maine, used the idea in *Way down east; or portraiture of Yankee life*. See “Sheep, N,” [The Oxford English Dictionary Online](#), 2nd 1989 ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), vol.

⁷⁸ The regime of commercial farming and industrial slaughter superceded the regime of family farming and artisanal slaughter in the United States in the mid-nineteenth century (around the same time as the expression made its way into the literary archive) with the advent of urban industrialization and the rise of the city (even though stockyards and abattoirs operated on its margins). Counting sheep has been a part of the shepherds work for centuries. In medieval Britain farmers were given access to common grazing land, but in order to avoid overgrazing shepherds were required to maintain careful count of their herds, which they did by employing a particularly monotonous Celtic-derived numbering system, Yan Yan Tethera. See Karen Gee, [Sheep’s Miscellany](#) (London: Murdoch Books, 2006) 120.

folklore—the steam from the tea cup reminds Stan of “when you’re making love, how a woman’s forehead gets sometimes”; when his daughter asks what makes the rain, Stan replies “Why it’s the devil beating his wife.” Stan grasps, as no one else around him does, the truth of his alienation, an alienation that can be no better rendered than in the incongruous scenes of grazing and dismembered sheep. The one is an image of an idyllic, pre-industrial past, the other of a Taylorized, murderous modernity. Stan must adapt himself to the industrial regime of his modern present, but cannot manage to exorcise the memory (or is it the myth?) of the pre-modern past.⁷⁹ It is the consciousness of the contradiction between the two regimes and of his own alienation within a ravishing modernity that produces his paralysis. Stan’s crisis is an existential one imposed by a system whose dynamics are perhaps racialized (i.e. the necessity of migration to the north; the neglect of the urban areas) but whose fundamental contradictions are not racial.

Killer of Sheep has often been compared with Italian Neorealism for its episodic structure, long takes, non-professional actors, objective camera.⁸⁰ And while *Killer of Sheep* certainly shares these characteristics with Italian Neorealism, a crucial difference is the importance of word play and the self-consciousness of Burnett’s characters. Burnett has said that he had not seen Italian neorealist films before making *Killer*. Perhaps, but surely he had seen *Vidas Secas* (1963), the neorealist-inspired film by Brazilian Nelson Pereira dos Santos (who visited UCLA), which was likely shown in the Film Club and was reportedly a favorite of the L.A. School.⁸¹ *Vidas Secas* is a sensitive portrait of the misery of life in the arid northeastern backlands of Brazil. It follows

⁷⁹ This is a reading that goes with the grain of the film. If we adopt a vantage point outside the text, we may be struck by the film’s efforts to summon imaginatively (not visually) the ghost of an authentic black culture, rooted in southern, rural life—the fount of truth, goodness, disalienation, etc. and the foil for Stan’s life in the ravaged, post-industrial, dystopian Watts. Adolph Reed has argued that Black Power’s faith in a repository of authentic black culture was “naïve both in that it was not sufficiently self-conscious and in that it mistook artifacts and idiosyncrasies of culture for its totality and froze them into an ahistorical theory of authenticity” (52). Militant black nationalism, according to Reed, “envisioned an obsolete model of black life. This yearning was hypostatized to the level of a ‘black culture’—a romantic retrieval of a vanishing black particularity. The vision of a black culture, of course, was grounded in residual features of black rural life prior to the migration to the North. They were primarily cultural patterns that had once been enmeshed in a lifeworld knitted together by kinship, voluntary association, and production within a historical context of rural racial domination. As that lifeworld disintegrated before urbanization and mass culture, black nationalism sought to reconstitute it” (52). It may make sense to see Charles Burnett’s film within this problematic elaborated by Reed—a film that in its way nostalgically mourns this passing black lifeworld and tries to reclaim (the positivity of) its scraps for Stan’s life and consciousness. This reading suggests that the film makes a strong argument for the salutary effects of cultural preservation for political consciousness: Stan’s folkloric sensibility would thus explain his extraordinary self-consciousness. See Adolph L. Reed, “Black Particularity Reconsidered,” *Is It Nation Time? Contemporary Essays on Black Power and Black Nationalism*, ed. Eddie S. Glaude (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).

⁸⁰ For a comparison to Italian Neorealism (*Bicycle Thieves*, in particular), see Massood, “An Aesthetic Appropriate to Conditions: *Killer of Sheep*, (Neo)Realism, and the Documentary Impulse.” Masilela also compares *Killer of Sheep* to Italian Neorealism. See Masilela, “The Los Angeles School of Black Filmmakers.”

⁸¹ Masilela, “The Los Angeles School of Black Filmmakers.”

the lives of a family of four (and a dog) that wanders the backlands in search of a vacant plot of land to cultivate and work cow herding. The film's realist style emphasizes the dryness of the land, the poverty of the people, the material and emotional crudity of the family. The film depends for its critique of conditions in the northeast of Brazil on the iconicity, the verisimilitude, of camerawork that manages to convey the desolation of the land with its dusty, cracked ground; of the shacks with their leaky roofs and disintegrating walls; and of characters with their sunken cheeks and vacant stares. The dialogue is sparse and the monosyllabic. The characters are not merely inarticulate—they don't say much—, it is suggested that they don't think much either as the family's existence has been reduced to that of brutes. While much of *Killer of Sheep's* power may be traced back to the stationary camera's documentation of the desolation of Watts cityscapes—vacant lots strewn with industrial detritus unfit for children's play—the critique of this poverty is clinched by musical counterpoint. For example, when Paul Robeson's rendition of "The House that I Live In"—whose lyrics are "What is America to me?...The children in the playground/ The faces that I see/ All races and religions/ That's America to me"—is laid over shots of children playing in a dangerous, empty lot as if in a playground, the irony is unmistakable. Similarly, while *Killer's* characters do not generally articulate their thoughts, when they speak, word play becomes an index of an interiority to which we cannot have direct access. This contrasts with *Vidas Secas* where stunted speech is further evidence of the absence of inner life. And *Killer of Sheep* contrasts with *Bush Mama*, whose protagonist is a cipher.

If Gerima's Dorothy is a character with no thoughts of her own, no inner life, the victim of the world's bad ideas, awaiting edification by the community's high priests, Burnett's Stan is a model of working class self-consciousness.⁸² While some scholars, perceiving perhaps the comparative elitism of Gerima's discourse, have tried to argue that Dorothy is an allegorical character,⁸³ others manifest their anxiety by

⁸² One may want to disagree with this point and cite the scene in which Stan refuses to be considered poor (after all, Stan objects, he gives to the salvation army) as an instance of false consciousness. While this scene may signal an imperfect self-consciousness, a mixed consciousness, it cannot single-handedly undermine our sense that Stan grasps a contradiction in his work life that prevents him from going along as usual. This surely signals his self-consciousness.

⁸³ See Young, *Soul Power : Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left*; Paula J. Massood, *Black City Cinema : African American Urban Experiences in Film*, Culture and the Moving Image (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003). Young writes, "... a 'realistic' representation of Dorothy is not necessarily his [Gerima's] primary concern; instead, Gerima makes *Bush Mama* into a contradictory canvas for both hope and despair" (234). Massood writes, "[...] while Dorothy is ostensibly the 'lead' of the film, we are denied exclusive identification with her point of view. In fact, Dorothy is more a symbolic representation of black inner-city

arguing for the film's substratal populism. Cynthia Young has tried both tacts. She has claimed that "*Bush Mama* ultimately tells a double narrative about Dorothy's development and the artist-intellectual's humility in the face of working-class common sense."⁸⁴ Her evidence comes from Dorothy's letter. Because the letter signals Dorothy's incipient "critique of intellectuals" ("talk easy"), it thereby also suggests that "Black consciousness and empowerment will not be a matter of simple transmission from the vanguard to the masses; rather, it will take open collaboration, a willingness of intellectuals to be schooled by the working class as much as the reverse."⁸⁵ But in fact, Dorothy's injunction to "talk easy," "her critique of intellectuals," does not cast the exchange as dialogic at all; it merely calls for greater monologic perspicuity.

My emphasis here is on the very different account of the state of black consciousness generated in the two films. While *Killer* suggests that Stan derives his inner sustenance, his clarity, his self-consciousness from a past rich in an unalienated intercourse with nature and in exposure to an authentic African-American folklore,⁸⁶ Gerima has little use for diasporic cultural practices in *Bush Mama* and shows little faith in *lumpen* consciousness absent instruction. Perhaps the difference in perspective owes to the difference between the working class subject of *Killer of Sheep* and the *lumpen* proletariat subject of *Bush Mama*. Perhaps it owes to the salutary effect of Stan's rural roots. Either way, we can see that the two films inflect the question of coming to consciousness entirely differently. In *Killer*, it is not Stan who must come to consciousness; it is the spectator that must catch up to Stan, that must grasp anew the contradictions of the society, though perhaps not revolutionary violence as its resolution. It is actually Burnett's film, and not Gerima's, that calls for "artist-intellectual's humility in the face of working-class common sense."

Despite the different approaches to consciousness that have been underplayed in the scholarly literature, *Bush Mama* and *Killer of Sheep*, the seminal films of the L.A. School, are ultimately similar in their efforts to redeem the black image in film. Paula Massood is thus quite right when she writes, "Unlike many

humanity than an individual. Her problems are community problems; her needs and desire are those shared by the community" (112-3).

⁸⁴ Young, *Soul Power : Culture, Radicalism, and the Making of a U.S. Third World Left* 239.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Massood echoes this view when she writes, "In using folk references in one of the rare scenes of connection among family members, Burnett suggests that the welfare of Stan, of his family, and of the community as a whole, is dependent upon the maintenance of an historical perspective that acknowledges a southern, or rural, past" (39). See Massood, "An Aesthetic Appropriate to Conditions: *Killer of Sheep*, (Neo)Realism, and the Documentary Impulse."

African American filmmakers working within the mainstream, members of the L.A. School expressed an explicitly political agenda that extended beyond profit-making and the superficial interrogation of representation; instead they were concerned with what they saw as the internal colonization of African Americans and film's role in the construction of subjectivity and self-respect" (23). But neither Burnett nor Gerima pursue a flatfooted version of the positive images approach whereby an archive of negative images are countered by the depiction of "good" black role models. If Burnett contributes to this project by granting his characters a thoughtful interiority they are denied in most mainstream representations, Gerima contributes a sense of the heterogeneity of the black community as each of the voices circulating in Dorothy's head represent a different negotiation of societal conditions.⁸⁷ Murashige has remarked on this feature in *Bush Mama*: "In presenting multiple narratives [T.C.'s, Angi's, Simmi's, etc.], insufficient in themselves yet powerful when assembled into an entire picture of resistance, Gerima resists the idea of a master narrative of opposition and liberation. Part of the community's strength lies in its ability to generate multiple narratives which all, in some particularity, address the crisis and provide the space, small as it may be, for critique and resistance to dominant narratives."⁸⁸ This heterogeneity implicitly challenges the thrust of stereotypic representation: namely the implicit view that stereotyped groups are monolithic and immutable. The claim for diversity within the group is a strike at the essentialism of racist discourses.

⁸⁷ It may be worth noting that this strategy—of juxtaposing several competing voices—is one that is frequently used by Spike Lee. Critics like bell hooks have complained about this strategy, accusing Lee of using "many stereotypical and archetypal figures (the 'wino,' the wise 'matriarchal' black woman, the 'hound dog' who is obsessed with sexuality)"(176) in *Do the Right Thing*, figures that lack all complexity. See Bell Hooks, *Yearning : Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics* (London: Turnaround, 1991). But I think hooks misunderstands. While it is true that Lee's characters often lack complexity, this tact serves his films. Each character provides an argument in what turns out to be a larger debate about what ails the community. The characters—Mookie ("I gotta get paid"), Jade ("I'm down for something positive in the community"), Da Mayor ("Always do the right thing"), mother sister, the Korean grocers ("I Black...You...Me same"), Buggin Out ("Who told you to buy a brownstone, on my block, in my neighborhood, on my side of the street?... Motherfuck gentrification"), Celtics fan ("As I understand it, this is a free country. A man can live wherever he wants"), Radio Raheem, Pino, Vito, Coconut Sid, Sweet Dick Willie, ML ("Look at those Korean motherfuckers across the street. I bet they haven't been off the boat a year before they open up their own place...Either them Korean motherfuckers are geniuses or you black asses are just plain dumb"), etc.—act almost like voice boxes, each for a discrete argumentative line. In this way, the film orchestrates a debate in which the spectator is invited to choose among heterogeneous views. Lee employs a similar strategy in *Bamboozled* with different characters taking conflicting positions on minstrelsy.

⁸⁸ Murashige, "Haile Gerima and the Political Economy of Cinematic Resistance," 198.

VIII

If it was Fanon that seemed to lend to the Los Angeles School “a sense of political and intellectual legitimacy and guidance in its quest for a particular form of ‘Third Worldism,’”⁸⁹ it was Cuban revolutionary cinema that provided an emulable model in the realm of filmmaking, according Ntongela Masilela, the most cited commentator on the L.A. School. It was Cuban revolutionary cinema more than perhaps any other Third Cinema practice that inspired the L.A. School. But the problematic faced by Cuban pioneers such as Tomás Gutierrez Alea, Humberto Solás, Julio García Espinosa was quite distinct from that of the other practitioners of Third Cinema. Whereas the cinema of elsewhere often pursued the theme of armed struggle (e.g. *La hora de los hornos*), the Cubans were singularly focused on the vicissitudes of consciousness: how to put cinema to work toward the formation of a new socialist man. Cuban cinema from the first was not interested in provoking revolution, but in playing a role in forging a new Cuban cultural identity. This orientation toward consciousness may be seen in a film like *Memories of Underdevelopment* (1968), in which the “underdevelopment” of the title refers not to Paul Baran’s economic category, but rather, to a species of psychosocial inferiority complex that accompanies the (neo)colonial condition so poignantly elaborated in Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*. It is worth emphasizing that the Cuban cultural strategy pursued the socialist project at the level of consciousness *concurrently* with a program at the level of politics and resource redistribution. The divestment from the old forms of bourgeois thought were conceived as the *necessary correlate* to transformation at the level of politics and economy, though certainly not sufficient in itself. If the later New Latin American Cinema outside of Cuba was inspired by the Cuban example—if Cuban revolutionary cinema’s concerns were generalized across the region—, it importantly must have imagined that a cinema of consciousness could function similarly in radically different political contexts, it must not have grasped that the task of political cinema in the post-revolution context is objectively different from its task in the pre-revolution context.

⁸⁹ Ntongela Masilela, “The Los Angeles School,” *IJELE: Art EJournal of the African World* Issue 5 (2002).

The influence of Cuban Cinema was “profound, immediate, undeniable” claims Masilela;⁹⁰ just note the similarities between Humberto Solás’ *Lucía* (1968) and Julie Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust* (1992), between Tomás Gutierrez Alea’s *Memories of Underdevelopment* and Haile Gerima’s *Harvest: 3,000 Years* and *Sankofa*.⁹¹ This assertion is odd (even symptomatic), in no obvious sense born out by even the most cursory examination of the films named. Perhaps the parallel between Alea and Gerima is not entirely off, but I would argue that it actually applies only in the case of *Bush Mama* and its link to *Memories of Underdevelopment*. Both are films about coming to consciousness, the former invites the viewer’s identification with a character (Dorothy) who arrives at consciousness by the end of the film and the latter with a character’s (Sergio) mixed, contradictory consciousness in order that the spectator can recognize the remnants of bourgeois consciousness in himself.

Alea’s lifetime preoccupation with consciousness, manifest in his oeuvre, makes him an especially important figure for Third Cinema—the cinematic practice devoted to its awakening. But even so, Alea was working on a peculiarly Cuban consciousness problem: the imperfect synergy between the taking of state power and the transformation of the ideas in people’s heads. In other words, he was addressing the realization that a socialist revolution does not transform minds overnight; if the Revolution was going to carry out its policies and regenerate itself from day to day and from generation to generation, it needed to construct a new subject, a new man—differently oriented to the social world, exorcized of bourgeois ideology.

Masilela has claimed that “The Cuban cinema imparted to the Los Angeles School a particular perspective and understanding of the relationship between revolution and art in revolutionary times”⁹² and that, “As with Cuba, the importance of the Latin American Cinema for members of the Los Angeles film school resided in its uncompromising examination of the relationship between film and national culture.”⁹³ But it bears mentioning that the L.A. School was not operating in revolutionary times, but in pre-revolutionary times. And Cuban cinema’s understanding of art in post-revolutionary times is consistent with

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Masilela, “The Los Angeles School of Black Filmmakers,” 110.

Fanon's analysis of national culture in *The Wretched of the Earth*: the revolution was the keystone that made the building of a national culture possible, but the culture under construction, with the help of *Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematográficos* (ICAIC), signaled a break with what had come before; there was no trace of the archaeological instinct as far as culture was concerned. The turn to history so evident in the work of Humberto Sólás or Sergio Giral (another L.A. School favorite) should not be confused with the archaeological spirit that animates Masilela's film comparisons above. Rather, the turn to history could be explained by the effort on the part of the Cubans, in historical materialist fashion, to recast the past as a dialectic, a series of episodes in the history of Cuban class conflict that would eventually lead to the Revolution; it turned the Revolution into the natural, inevitable culmination of Cuban history.

When Masilela approvingly notes that the opening of *Daughters of the Dust* with its "African polyrhythms" bears the influence of the pre-credit sequence of *Memories of Underdevelopment*, he reveals the vacuity of his comparison. For, while it is true that *Memories of Underdevelopment* opens with a scene of an outdoor popular, community dance—which Julianne Burton describes as "dancing couples—detached, absorbed—gyrating to the insistent beat of Afro-Cuban drums"⁹⁴—, the music and the dancing do not signify the national culture that the film embraces. And the "African polyrhythms" detectable in the song that plays, "Donde esta Teresa?" by Pello el Afrokán, are not quite the point even if the Afro-Cuban woman (not a character in the film) on whom the camera freeze frames before cutting to the narrative is the point (figure 23). Julianne Burton has argued that but for the atypical, cinema vérité approach to the shooting, this "stereotypical vision of Cuban life" would have been "virtually *de rigueur* in films made in Cuba throughout the country's ignominious pre-revolutionary cinema history."⁹⁵ The archetypal vision is ultimately disrupted by a shooting in the midst of the revelers (who ignore it and keep dancing) and the viewer is thus jolted out of his passive contemplation of what Burton calls the "illusion of exoticism" but what Masilela would perhaps call "African polyrhythms."

⁹⁴ Julianne Burton, "Memories of Underdevelopment in the Land of Overdevelopment," *Memories of Underdevelopment* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990) 236.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

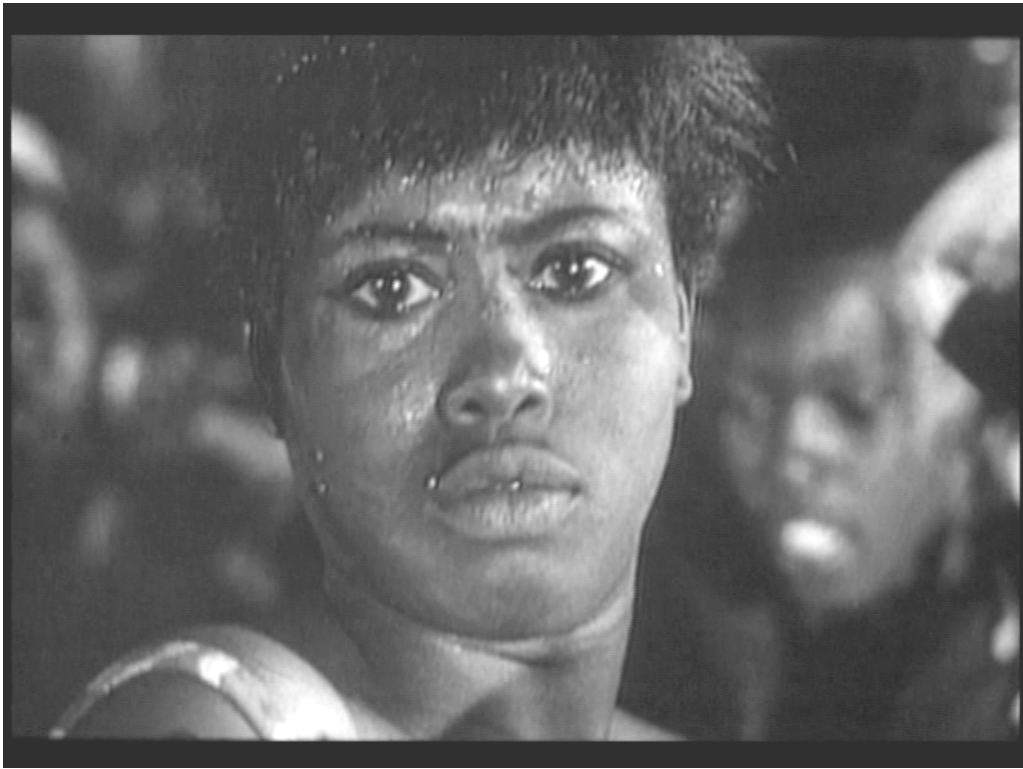


Figure 23. Freeze framed image ends the credit sequence of *Memorias* (1968)
Memorias del subdesarrollo [*Memories of Underdevelopment*] (New Yorker Films, 1968)

There is no question that Sergio (Sergio Corrieri), the protagonist of *Memories of Underdevelopment*, suffers from cultural colonialism: he has always tried to “live like a European,” he tells his proletarian girlfriend, Elena, as they make their way through an exhibit of abstract art at the Belles Artes Museum. This admission is perhaps the most striking feature of the destructive legacy of (neo)colonialism and the psychology of underdevelopment. Alea, in an article written for the film’s tenth anniversary, writes of Sergio’s condition: “His contrariness and the source of his dissension lie in knowing himself to be alienated by cultural patterns foreign to his own environment, and nevertheless unable to struggle to assert himself. He is already a defeated man who reveals the cultural colonization that has victimized us throughout our history, the consequence of which, within the revolution, is located in a general sense of underdevelopment.” Echoing this theme, one of the film’s posters features the two ancient Greek columns in what looks like the process of restoration. Still, the film does *not* contrast Sergio’s apartment full of contemporary European art or his mania

for tracing the outlines of Sandro Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* with a positive conception of the “authentic” Cuban national alternative—typified by the pre-credit sequence with its “African polyrhythms”—that he rejects. The film itself stands in for the alternative; it is itself national culture and mixes, indiscriminately, cinematic styles associated with other national cinemas and figures including Godard, Italian Neorealism, Eisenstein, Vertov.



Figure 24. *Memorias* (1968) Film Poster

As for the freeze frame on a close-up of an Afro-Cuban woman, sweat droplets covering her face, who is she? The face of the new nation or of the old, underdeveloped one?⁹⁶ Does it establish Cuba as a symbolically black nation? Perhaps. The film, from this opening sequence, invites a Fanonian reading. Its subject is cultural colonization and what text elaborates this condition more compellingly than *Black Skin, White Masks*? The dilemma articulated by the film takes up where Fanon leaves off. Once the revolution takes place, what then of cultural colonialism's lingering legacy? What is the remedy to its depredations? Tomás Gutierrez Alea offers no blueprints.

⁹⁶ For example, Fernando Pérez, a Cuban film critic, commenting on the film's opening sequence describes the last freeze frame like this: "In the end, it [camera] fixes itself in front of the startled face of a young black woman, sweating, panting, . . . underdeveloped?" (228). See Fernando Pérez, "A Dialectical and Partisan Film," *Ibid.*

IX

In this chapter, I have tried to provide a general context for seeing the L.A. School's links to two sources of influence: Third Cinema and the work of Frantz Fanon. There is no question that L.A. School films bear the imprint of these influences, yet I have emphasized differences over similarities in order to counter the available scholarship that has failed to take seriously enough the relevant political distinctions. The failures of current scholarship manifest in a dearth of close readings of even the most seminal films of the L.A. School. I have tried to address this failure.

5.0 THE PRICE OF HEAVEN: REMAKING POLITICS IN *ALL THAT HEAVEN ALLOWS*, *ALI: FEAR EATS THE SOUL*, AND *FAR FROM HEAVEN*

I

Commentators on Todd Haynes's *Far from Heaven* (2002) have often pointed out that it is a remake of Douglas Sirk's *All that Heaven Allows*, a 1955 family melodrama about a bourgeois widow who begins an affair with her young gardener only to be ostracized by her high-society peers. Like Sirk's original, Haynes's remake is set in a suburban hamlet in the northeast circa 1957. Unlike the original, Haynes's film dispenses with the class and generational conflicts of *All that Heaven Allows*, replacing these with conflicts over interracial love and sexual orientation.

But Haynes's film is not the first reworking of *All that Heaven Allows*. Rainer Werner Fassbinder's 1974 film, *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*, also revises Sirk's original. Fassbinder's version depicts the troubled affair of an elderly German cleaning woman and a significantly younger, black Moroccan "guest worker" who has come to Munich as part of Germany's post-war labor recruitment program.

Many writers have observed that Haynes's film stands in a complicated relation both to the two earlier texts, and to the contemporary moment. Some have argued that this is an "historical" film, bent on exposing the less than pristine realities secreted away behind the smooth patina of Eisenhower's America, and obscured by representations of the time (like Sirk's) that were constrained by convention and the Production Code.¹ Others have said that *Far from Heaven* arrogantly condescends to the past, overconfident that there has been significant social progress in the intervening years.²

¹ See, for instance, Sharon Willis, "The Politics of Disappointment: Todd Haynes Rewrites Douglas Sirk," *Camera Obscura* 54 18.4 (2003). Robert Sklar, "Far from Heaven Review," *Cineaste* 28.2 (2003); Amy Taubin, "In Every Dream House," *Film Comment* 38.5 (2002).

² See James Harvey, "Made in Heaven," *Film Comment* 39.2 (2003).

I will argue, conversely, that *Far from Heaven* eludes many of the categories that would allow us to make sense of either its relation to Sirk and Fassbinder, or its relation to the contemporary moment. By setting its narrative in the same time and place as the original, rather than updating them, *Far from Heaven* fails to do what most remakes do. Nor does *Far from Heaven* quite fit Fredric Jameson's category of the "nostalgia film"—a film that evokes a past by imitating the stylistic tropes of that historical moment's representations of itself, but that is neither properly historical nor contemporary. Haynes's film is too self-reflexive to fit this description.

Perhaps the greatest obstacle to making sense of *Far from Heaven*'s relation to the present is its seemingly banal treatment of race and sexual orientation. The displays of racism and homophobia and the surface-level injunction to tolerance and color blindness seem, from a contemporary vantage point, hopelessly outdated. If we insist on such a flatfooted reading, we are forced to conclude that *Far from Heaven* is indeed an "historical film" bent on highlighting our social progress, the difference between then and now, past and present; and we are left feeling an uneasy sort of relief that at least times change.

Ultimately, I will argue for a reading of all three films that casts *Far from Heaven* as a film responding to the problematic of coalition politics set up in *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*, which in turn recasts *All that Heaven Allows* as a film about identity and class politics. In doing so, I will propose an alternative reading of *Far from Heaven*'s seemingly straightforward, and ultimately banal, critique of the racism and homophobia of fifties society. I will argue that what is being represented is not so much the twin ills of a bygone era, but the contemporary crisis over who, properly, constitutes the subject of historical agency. The film deconstructs the promise of identity politics and the coalitions forged on their basis. And as it disavows identity politics at the level of the narrative, the film distances itself from the melodramatic mode at the level of generic mode. The interest of Haynes's film lies in the way it questions the ability of the moralizing mode of melodrama to address the social issues of the contemporary historical moment.

II

According to Fredric Jameson, postmodernism is the cultural correlate of a third stage of capitalism, what he calls “late” or “multinational” capitalism. Postmodernism is characterized by, among other things, the erosion of historicity—that is, the loss of “the perception of the present as history.”³ Genuine historicity would entail a representation that achieves a defamiliarization of the present, one that “allows us that distance from immediacy which is at length characterized as a historical perspective.”⁴ The nostalgia mode in film is just one more symptom of the postmodern erosion of historicity.

For Jameson, the nostalgia film may be understood narrowly or broadly.⁵ Narrowly conceived, it includes films set in the past and “about specific generational moments of that past”;⁶ *American Graffiti* (George Lucas), a 1973 film about the 1950s, or *Chinatown* (Roman Polanski), a 1974 film about the 1930s, would fit this description, as would any “historical film.” Yet, for Jameson, this approach to the past is inevitably pervaded by pastiche, defined as the “the imitation of a peculiar or unique style ... without parody’s ulterior motive.”⁷ These films about the past are “never really a matter of some old-fashioned ‘representation’ of historical content, but instead approach[ed] the ‘past’ through stylistic connotation, conveying ‘pastness’ by the glossy qualities of the image, and ‘1930s-ness’ or ‘1950s-ness’ by the attributes of fashion.”⁸

In Jameson’s broader conception, a nostalgia film is any film—set in the past or in the present—that makes use of pastiche. And inasmuch as they typically make use of pastiche, remakes are paradigmatic examples of nostalgia films.⁹ Jameson uses *Body Heat*—the 1981 remake of *Double Indemnity*—as an example. Set in a contemporary (1981) Florida context, the film makes use of pastiche in its choice of Art Deco credits and in the virtual absence of the objects of late capitalism.¹⁰

³ Fredric Jameson, Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, Post-Contemporary Interventions (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991) 284.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ See for a critique of Jameson’s taxonomy, see Anne Friedberg, “Les Flâneurs Du Mal(L): Cinema and the Postmodern Condition,” PMLA 106.3.

⁶ Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism and Consumer Society,” The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture, ed. Hal Foster (New York: New Press, 1998) 133.

⁷ Ibid. 131.

⁸ Jameson, Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism 19.

⁹ Ibid. 134.

¹⁰ Ibid.

What the nostalgia film does, on either conception, is turn the viewer's present moment into an eternal past that is beyond real historical time and thus closed off to the intervention of human agency. The resulting representation is neither a representation of the past nor a representation of the present, both of which necessarily elude us in this new historical situation.¹¹ For Jameson, it is not the case that genuine historicity would allow a representation of the "real past" (i.e., something other than a simulacrum of the past), but rather that historicity "can first and foremost be defined as a perception of the present as history."¹²

Far from Heaven appears to be a nostalgia film on both the broad and the narrow conceptions, and therefore doubly nostalgic: it is set in the past (1957), and it is a remake of Sirk's *All that Heaven Allows* that indulges in pastiche. But I will argue that *Far From Heaven* does not do what nostalgia films do—it does not efface the present.¹³

The first thing to notice is that *Far from Heaven* is not a typical remake.¹⁴ In his discussion of the remake, Thomas Leitch identifies four kinds of remake, each characterized by a different stance toward the original: the "readaptation," the "update," the "homage," and the "true remake."¹⁵ The first two are not relevant to this discussion, as they primarily engage the filmic remake's relation to a classic literary text. The third taxonomic category sketched by Leitch is the "homage," which has been mainly a European trend. The homage treats its cinematic precursor as a classic "in danger of being ignored or forgotten."¹⁶ The homage defines the relation between two cinematic texts—it valorizes the earlier one without trying to replace it. It is a film that has no life outside of its intertextual relation to the original; it succumbs entirely to

¹¹ Ibid. 21.

¹² Ibid. 284.

¹³ Pam Cook, in *Screening the Past: Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema*, considers *Far from Heaven* to be a "nostalgic memory film" which is defined by the way it "reconstructs an idealized past as a site of pleasurable contemplation and yearning"(4). But for Cook, unlike for Jameson, nostalgia, understood as a yearning for that which is lost forever, is not inherently reactionary: "it can be perceived as a way of coming to terms with the past, as enabling it to be exorcised in order that society, and individuals, can move on" (4). See Pam Cook, *Screening the Past: Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2005).

¹⁴ Some commentators argue that *Far from Heaven* is not a remake at all. See Ibid; Laura Mulvey, "Review," *Sight and Sound* 13.3.

¹⁵ Thomas Leitch, "Twice-Told Tales: Disavowal and the Rhetoric of the Remake," *Dead Ringers: The Remake in Theory and Practice*, eds. Jennifer Forrest and Leonard Koos (Albany: SUNY, 2002). For competing taxonomies, see also Michael B. Druzman, *Make It Again, Sam: A Survey of Movie Remakes* (South Brunswick [N.J.]: A. S. Barnes, 1975); Harvey Roy Greenberg, "Raiders of the Lost Text: Remaking as Contested Homage in *Always*," *Play It Again, Sam: Retakes on Remakes*, eds. Andrew Horton and Stuart McDougal (Berkeley: University of California, 1991). I discuss only Leitch because his taxonomy is most attuned to the temporal dimension (i.e., to the significance of updating or not), which I think is key to making sense of these films. For an assessment of these approaches and the taxonomic enterprise in general, see Constantine Verevis, *Film Remakes* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006).

¹⁶ Thomas Leitch, "Twice-Told Tales: The Rhetoric of the Remake," *Film and Literature Quarterly* 18.3: 144.

the authority of the original. The homage manages the “enabling paradox” of the remake—that it is like the original, only better—by opting out, by relinquishing any assertion of superiority.¹⁷ *Far from Heaven* should not be considered an homage because it is not primarily allusive: while it clearly hopes to refocus attention on a forgotten master, it also provokes a broader examination of the representational strategies of that master. *Far from Heaven* retains an autonomy and ambition of its own, which is not characteristic of the homage.¹⁸

The fourth species of remake, the “true remake,” is, for Leitch, the paradigmatic form of the remake. The true remake relies most visibly on a triangular relationship between three texts: an original (usually a literary text), which it tries to usurp; a second remake, which it borrows from but disavows; and itself. Using *Body Heat* as an example, Leitch argues that the elements of pastiche, the evocations of the 1940s, function to call attention to *Double Indemnity* in order to disavow its own discursive markers; then it “liberates values that were present in the story [James Cain’s novel] all along but were obscured by the circumstances of its earlier incarnation [*Double Indemnity*],”¹⁹ namely unseen sexual content. The true remake claims the story and concomitant prestige of the original and updates that story, then it borrows the discourse of its cinematic precursor while disavowing its story. The effect is that, “[t]he [true] remake ... takes what is presented as a classic, timeless story and updates it—partly by the paradoxical attempt to remove all markers of any historical period whatever.”²⁰ This is accomplished by a systematic effacement of signs of the remake’s period through the mining of a past discursive incarnation (the second version). “The true remake is pretending, in effect, that it has no discourse of its own to become outdated”;²¹ it presents itself as a work outside of time.

Far from Heaven may be said to be involved in this kind of triangular relationship, situating itself *vis à vis* both Sirk’s *All that Heaven Allows* and Fassbinder’s *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*, to which it does not make explicit reference. But while Leitch’s true remake is engaged in disavowing both its intertextuality and its own textuality in a struggle against time, *Far from Heaven* disavows neither, citing a source—Douglas Sirk—for

¹⁷ Ibid.: 145.

¹⁸ In *Film Remakes*, Constantine Verevis categorizes both *Far from Heaven* and *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* as homages. It seems quite clear that *Ali* does not imagine itself to be a secondary text at all, but one that attempts to apply certain of Sirk’s insights to Fassbinder’s own, more radical project. It is more plausible to claim that *Far from Heaven* is an homage; but, as I hope to demonstrate, Haynes’s film is less recuperative and historical and more generative and contemporary. See Verevis, *Film Remakes*.

¹⁹ Ibid. 53.

²⁰ Ibid. 52.

²¹ Ibid. 53.

both. The film copies Sirk's discourse more closely than his story. *Far From Heaven* copies scenes and sequences from Sirk almost verbatim (including the credits), while making major adjustments to Sirk's story. Because it explicitly locates itself in the past—the fifties—it cannot be said to be pretending it is contemporary either. It is peculiar in that it does not update the original as *Body Heat* updates its original, *Double Indemnity*, simultaneously employing simulacra of the forties while eschewing the explicit reference. Rather, *Far From Heaven* produces the original as the original: the diegetic time of the original and its copy are the same (though produced close to fifty years apart, both are set in 1950s New England), and Sirk's aesthetics have been closely reproduced.²²

The obvious question is: Why present a remake as an original—why “re-do” a film? One answer is that the project of the film is, as Sharon Willis puts it, “archeological”:²³ it aims to excavate the social reality of fifties desire, a reality that could not have been presented in the original.²⁴ Following this reading, *Far from Heaven* is a backward-looking historical film that aims to represent the “real past” and fails—as nostalgia films inevitably do. But this reading cannot account for the imitation of Sirkian aesthetics and the observance of certain production codes of the time (e.g., the prohibition against interracial sex on screen), and it turns *Far from Heaven* into just another example of postmodern artistic production à la Jameson.

I would argue, however, that *Far From Heaven* “re-does” *All that Heaven Allows* not in order to expose the dirty laundry of the past, but rather in order to say something about the present. *Far From Heaven* is a very special kind of remake. If most remakes update the time and/or place of the original, but keep the narrative roughly the same, *Far from Heaven* imitates the discourse and preserves the historical setting of the original, but modifies the story in significant ways. By presenting the same story in a different historical setting, most remakes emphasize the timelessness of the story. By presenting a different story in the same historical setting

²² Even Verevis, who is skeptical about “purely textual descriptions of the remake, particularly those which seek to ground the category in a rigid distinction between an original story and its new discursive incarnation” (28), thinks that the repetition of narrative units in the remake “most often ... relate to the content ... rather than to the form ... of the film” (21). He mentions *Far from Heaven* as a rare example of the way such talk (of story and discourse) can be “frustrated by those remakes which repeat not only the narrative invention of an original property but seek...to recreate the expressive design of an earlier film” (28). I would only add that the uncommonness of this kind of repetition requires special attention. See Ibid.

²³ Willis, “The Politics of Disappointment: Todd Haynes Rewrites Douglas Sirk,” 135.

²⁴ Pam Cook has expressed a similar view. Cook writes: “*Far from Heaven* digs beneath the surface to uncover the fractures in the 1950s vision of the happy heterosexual couple and the white middle-class family that formed the basis of the burgeoning consumer economy” (13); “Todd Haynes’ probing beneath the surfaces of Sirk’s melodramas reveals a hidden American history” (15). See Cook, *Screening the Past : Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema*.

with roughly the same aesthetics, *Far from Heaven* emphasizes the adjustments it has made to the narrative; herein lies its contemporaneity. The contemporary content of *Far from Heaven* is, as it were, the arithmetic difference between its narrative and that of the original. This difference is what needs to be explained.

Far from Heaven may be a species of remake, but it is not a nostalgia film, at least not in spirit. For it does not stage the past as present, and thus timeless. Nor does it stage the past as true history, the way an historical film does. Rather, it casts the present as past history, forcing us to register our historical situatedness. In Jameson's terms, it may be considered an attempt to recuperate historicity and fashion an "aesthetic representation of our own current experience."²⁵ For it manages to put the past (represented by a discourse that self-consciously presents itself as discourse and not as reality) and the present (represented by new story content) together in the same frame. *Far from Heaven* forces one to ask: "What has changed since then?"

Far from Heaven receives a measure of its timeliness from the adjustments it makes, at the level of narrative, to *All that Heaven Allows*. These adjustments involve the expansion of identity positions, from class and gender in *All that Heaven Allows* to race, gender, and sexuality in *Far from Heaven*. But the adjustments owe much to Fassbinder's own reworking of Sirk's film in *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*. Haynes's impulse is not toward a timeless depiction, but the reverse. Time, history, and the nature of change are the subject of the film, which is why this particular kind of remake is fitting.

III

All that Heaven Allows is the story of a middle-aged bourgeois widow, Cary Scott (Jane Wyman), her affair with a younger gardener, Ron Kirby (Rock Hudson), and the community that shuns her because of the relationship. The nature of Cary's transgression is ambiguous. Does the disapproval of the community and her children owe more to Ron's age, or his class? Is the object of their ridicule the inappropriateness of female desire or that of cross-class fraternizing? From the outside, it looks as though only desire could explain their relationship. What else could Cary want with a "gardener" but sex ("a good looking set of muscles," as

²⁵Jameson, "Postmodernism and Consumer Society," 135.

her son puts it)? And what else could Ron want with Cary but her money? The age conflict refers us back to the class conflict; the two are inextricably linked, but the film obscures the nature of the latter.²⁶

Cary's Stoningham community misrecognizes the union between Cary and Ron as one that transgresses class barriers as well as breaching decorum.²⁷ Ron may be working as a gardener, but he is not a wage laborer; he is not selling his labor-power for an hourly fee: he is a member of the bourgeoisie. Perhaps this is why Cary constantly reassures her children and friends that "if they knew him, they would like him." They would like him if only they knew what she knows—namely, that he is not only a gardener, but also a successful small businessman.

Early in the film, when Ron first introduces himself to Cary, he establishes the basis of the distinction. He tells Cary that: 1) he is old Kirby's son, inheritor of the business, and not a hired worker; 2) he has studied agriculture in school (i.e., he is in some sense a professional); and 3) yard work is not essential to his livelihood—he has better things in store, namely, his nursery business (so he probably will not be coming back next autumn). The relationship is consolidated only after Ron is tied to the American philosophical legacy of Henry David Thoreau. With this philosophical foundation, Ron's status as "just" a gardener is fully disavowed, and romance becomes possible.

In her essay "Melodrama Revisited," Linda Williams posits that the primary ideological function of the melodramatic film text is to deliver moral legibility, or the assignation of guilt and innocence in a post-sacred world in which the surface of reality is deceptive, masking the hidden source of all value and meaning. The melodramatic text delivers this moral legibility by focusing on victim-heroes and the "the recognition of

²⁶ For more on the relation between the age and class conflict in the film, see Chuck Kleinhans, "Notes on Melodrama and the Family under Capitalism," *Film Reader* 3 (1978). For an assessment of the relation between the conflicts of social class and "sex class" in Sirk films, see Michael Selig, "Contradiction and Reading: Social Class in *Imitation of Life*," *Wide Angle* 10.4. For a historical review of the auteurist orientation of Sirk criticism and for a critical assessment of scholarly close reading as a Film Studies methodology, see Barbara Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

²⁷ The misrecognition of the community is most obviously manifested in the language that is used to discuss Ron's vocation: He is repeatedly referred to as a "gardener." When Sara, Cary's best friend, learns of the affair, she asks incredulously: "You can't be serious. Your gardener?" The high-society cocktail party-goers similarly inquire, "A gardener?" to which another replies, "Why doesn't he find himself a better money-making vocation?" Even Cary's son, Ned, before he meets Ron, is disturbed by his mother's impending marriage to "old Kirby, the gardener[s]" son, to which Cary replies, "You don't know him." Ned answers, "We know the *type*."

a hidden or misunderstood virtue.”²⁸ In *All that Heaven Allows*, Ron is the character of unrecognized virtue: it is his virtue that Cary and the viewer come to see, and that the Stoningham elite does not.²⁹ But in what does Ron’s virtue consist? He is virtuous inasmuch as he has rejected the consumerism of the country club set. Let us be clear: he rejects this consumerism *on principle*. Virtue is shown here by freely chosen actions.³⁰ And Ron *can* be virtuous in this way precisely because he is not really the wage laborer that he appears to be. The wage laborer is not a wage laborer by choice: he cannot quit civilization, retreating to his inherited plot of land in the country to grow green beans in solitude. Ron appears in the film—wielding Thoreau, a good chunk of land, and a beloved nursery project—as if to say, “I am not like a regular gardener: somewhat disempowered, with few choices, forced to tend to your trees now so that my children won’t have to. I have an education. I have land. I have trees. I have choices. And I *choose* freely an alternative lifestyle because yours is corrupt.” Had Ron been cast as a “real” wage laborer, his censure of Cary’s world would have looked comparatively weaker: a worker’s declaration of moral contempt for such a world would seem like *ressentiment* and not the action of a free and noble individual. The sign of Ron’s virtue is simultaneously the sign of his class position *and* the basis of Cary’s admiration and of the community’s misunderstanding.

There can be little doubt that *All that Heaven Allows* contains a critique of consumer society. But the critique is moralistic and not political in that it targets wayward individuals, not dysfunctional systems. Cary’s people are craven: if pressed, they would recognize the superiority of Ron’s principles to theirs, but still they could not live by them. Ron’s alternative idyllic natural world is cast as a non-exploitative, simple commodity-producing utopia peopled with charming petit bourgeois artisans wringing their means of life

²⁸ Linda Williams, “Melodrama Revisited,” *Refiguring American Film Genres*, ed. Nick Browne (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998) 8. Williams adapts Peter Brooks’s treatment of the melodramatic mode in literature to film. See Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination : Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*, Columbia University Press Morningside ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

²⁹ Perhaps it could be argued that Cary is also a victim-hero. After all, like Ron, her self-sacrifice goes unrecognized by her children and results indirectly in her headache symptoms. But I would add that to the degree that she comes to share Ron’s ethical principles, so too does her virtue multiply in our eyes. If her love object were a scoundrel, would the breakup seem like such a self-sacrificing act? In other words, our perception of her victimization depends on our reading of Ron.

³⁰ It is often the case in melodrama that virtue is usually shown by suffering. In *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson*, Linda Williams has persuasively argued that in melodrama, victimization and suffering count as proof of virtue “for if virtue is not obvious, suffering ... is” (29). My point is only that Ron is an exception to this rule. His virtue is demonstrated not so much by suffering (although he is shown to suffer at the hands of the Stoningham elite) as by deeds, freely chosen actions, which could only have been undertaken by a man in Ron’s position. See Linda Williams, *Playing the Race Card : Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2001).

from land, sea, and air. Ron and his friends value nature, authenticity, craftsmanship, and, ultimately, unalienated manual labor. They struggle—sufficiently free from material need—to realize their principles in practice. This is a conflict of values, and not a class conflict: it is a quibble internal to the bourgeoisie.

Jon Halliday has remarked that Sirk built into this film “*the history of the concealed disintegration of the society*.”³¹ He set the film in New England, “the place where contemporary America started, and started to go wrong.”³² In Halliday’s view, “Hudson and his trees are both America’s past and America’s ideals. They are ideals which are unattainable—and, when they actually offer themselves in concrete form, are swiftly rejected by Wyman and her bourgeois friends on her behalf.”³³ But, in fact, it is not the ideals that are rejected. Cary’s friends know nothing of Ron’s ideals: they assume that Ron is what he appears to be, namely a wage laborer. Cary is not unlike her friends: she just knows *more* about Ron. She admires him precisely *for* his ideals, as they probably would also. Neither Cary nor her friends have a competing worldview or set of principles with which to challenge Ron’s; their actions and reactions are cynical, marked by an unthinking pragmatism, devoid of utopian aspirations. If Cary rejects Ron (temporarily), it is for practical reasons, out of convenience, and *with* the knowledge that in another sort of world, she, too, could live by such principles (figure 25). The ideals themselves are not contested in the film.³⁴

³¹ Jon Halliday and Laura Mulvey, eds., Douglas Sirk (Edinburgh Film Festival, 1972) 61. (emphasis original).

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ It must be admitted that if Cary and Ron share the same ideals, they probably have a different assessment of how to behave in light of the gulf between “real life” and the ideal. For Ron, the ethical point of view dictates that one should act *as if* the “real world” were the ideal world; for Cary, to do so is hopelessly utopian. The conflict is not over *what* the “good” values are, but the conditions of possibility for the pursuit of those values.



Figure 25. Cary (Jane Wyman) reads from Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* in Douglas Sirk's *All that Heaven Allows* (Universal, 1955)

But if the film is sympathetic to Ron's Thoreauvian ideals, why does the natural world, the synecdoche of these ideals, appear so contrived?³⁵ A good example of this contrivance is the appearance of a deer in the picture window at the film's end, as Cary cares for Ron after his fall from the side of the mountain.³⁶ Film scholars have said that the stylized representation of natural spaces serves an ironic purpose: to delegitimize the Thoreauvian ideal. But another reading is possible. The use of techniques of

³⁵ Much of the critical literature around Sirk has focused on style, particularly his use of an "ironic mise-en-scène." It is worth noting that while scholars agree on the *fact* of stylization in the mise-en-scène, there is some disagreement on its effect and implications. Paul Willemen, for example, has said of Sirk's work that "It is extremely difficult to make any clear cut and precise distinction between stylization and parody" (28). See Paul Willemen, "Distantiation and Douglas Sirk," *Douglas Sirk*, eds. Laura Mulvey and Jon Halliday (Edinburgh Film Festival, 1972). Elsewhere, Willemen has lamented the sophisticated viewer that misreads Sirk's films by "turning it into camp" (133), a danger connected with an overinvestment in parodic readings of stylization. See Paul Willemen, "Toward and Analysis of the Sirkian System," *Screen* 13.4 (1972/3). For a critical assessment of the use of stylization in the funeral scene featuring Mahalia Jackson in *Imitation of Life*, see Lauren Berlant, "National Brands/ National Bodies: *Imitation of Life*," *The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. Bruce Robbins (Minnesota: Minnesota University Press, 1993).

³⁶ For this view, see John Mercer and Martin Shingler, *Melodrama: Genre, Style, Sensibility* (New York: Wallflower Press, 2004); Thomas Schatz, *Hollywood Genres: Formulas, Filmmaking, and the Studio System* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1981). Mercer and Shingler grant that "From the opening scene of the film Ron is symbolically linked to a typically clichéd notion of nature" but agree with Schatz that the clichéd representation functions to highlight the way in which Ron's "alternative lifestyle" is not much better than the one Cary has fled. After all, "Ron ... seemingly free thinking, still adopts a paternalistic attitude toward Cary, forcing her to choose between the life and security that she has known or his 'new' way of living" (67). Thus, by the film's end, the pathos of the false happy ending owes to the continuation (in a new guise) of Cary's oppression by patriarchy.

Brechtian defamiliarization to depict Ron's world (so often commented on in the Sirk literature) situate the ideal in a mythic historical past, a time before modernity.³⁷ In other words, the contrived natural spaces may be seen as functioning nostalgically, rather than ironically.³⁸

Tracing the etymology of "nostalgia," Linda Hutcheon has noted its shift from being a seventeenth-century medical term designating severe, but curable, homesickness to a term designating an incurable psychic condition by the eighteenth-century.

What made that transition possible was a shift in site from the spatial to the temporal.

Nostalgia was no longer simply a yearning to return home ... [Sufferers] in fact, did not want to return to a *place*, but to a *time*, a time of youth. Time, unlike space, cannot be returned to—ever; time is irreversible. And nostalgia becomes the reaction to that sad fact.³⁹

I want to suggest that *All that Heaven Allows* is nostalgic in both these senses of the word. The film presents two different time periods contiguously: there is, on the one hand, the present of its production—the 1950s—represented by Cary's world; and on the other hand, a mythic pastoral American past the film wishes to use as the basis for its critique of the present,⁴⁰ represented by Ron's utopian world. Ron's world represents a space of innocence. One central feature of the melodramatic mode, according to Williams, is that it begins and wants to end in such a space.⁴¹

³⁷ One could object that the mise-en-scène of Cary's world is similarly artificial. The difference is that in the case of her world, the style is consistent with the narrative: Cary's people are as inauthentic and contrived as the representation of the spaces they inhabit.

³⁸ Linda Hutcheon—trying to understand why postmodern artifacts can be simultaneously deemed, by different critics, as both ironic and nostalgic—argues that nostalgia and irony have gone hand in hand for a long time. Her point is that both irony and nostalgia (contrary to the Jamesonian view that casts nostalgia, but not irony, as always an obstacle to "genuine politics") are "transideological," that is, they "can be made to 'happen' by (and to) anyone of any political persuasion": nostalgia was a feature of fascism *and* negritude. (One could object that negritude too was ideologically doomed.) In Hutcheon's view, this is the case because "to call something ironic or nostalgic is, in fact, less a *description* of the ENTITY ITSELF than an *attribution* of a quality of RESPONSE" ("Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern"). Based on the same textual evidence—the contrived representation of nature—I think one could derive both readings proposed above. See Linda Hutcheon, *Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern*, 1998, Available: <http://www.library.utoronto.ca/utel/criticism/hutchinp.htm>.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Following Bakhtin, Hutcheon writes, "Simultaneously distancing and proximating, nostalgia exiles us from the present as it brings the imagined past near. The simple, pure, ordered, easy, beautiful, or harmonious past is constructed (and then experienced emotionally) in conjunction with the present—which, in turn, is constructed as complicated, contaminated, anarchic, difficult, ugly, and confrontational." See Ibid.

⁴¹ Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson* 28.

According to Hutcheon, the pathos of nostalgic representation “depends precisely on the *irrecoverable* nature of the past.”⁴² If the film’s happy ending seems somehow hollow—when Cary and Ron are reunited, a deer pauses at the window—it is because Ron’s world does not exist within the same temporal frame as Cary’s. Situating the ideal in an irrecoverable past is the source of the film’s pathos; even a nominally reunited couple cannot affect the sense that, in Linda Williams’s terms, it is too late, that the real object of loss in this melodramatic text is time, a time when the ideal (always desirable) was also attainable.⁴³ What would the story of the disintegrating consumer society look like if there were no yardstick, no ideal, by which to measure the society’s self-betrayal? The Thoreauvian point of view represents the ideal—“the good.” And *All that Heaven Allows* tries to make that moral good legible, if irrecoverably remote.

That the critique of the decadent present is made under the banner of Thoreauvian transcendentalism, also notoriously nostalgic, is fitting. Sirk himself lamented that this aspect of the film had been so neglected in the film’s reception.⁴⁴ Thoreau was writing in the period between the Revolutionary War and the Civil War, when New England was undergoing a major “ecosocial transformation.”⁴⁵ The agricultural and mercantile order of the colonial period was being replaced by the first stage of modern capitalism. The result was a starkly divided class society with new levels of immiseration, exploitation, and technological innovation.⁴⁶ Amidst these developments in the 1830s were worker’s strikes, growing unrest, and the prospect of violent class warfare.⁴⁷ Faced with an organized working class and economic crisis, Thoreau’s model for social change posits the priority of self-transformation.⁴⁸ Leo Marx has argued in *The*

⁴² Hutcheon, *Irony, Nostalgia, and the Postmodern*.

⁴³ According to Williams, “A melodrama does not have to contain multiple scenes of pathetic death to function melodramatically. What counts is the feeling of loss suffused throughout the form. Audiences may weep or not weep, but the sense of a loss that implicates readers or audiences is central. And with this feeling of ‘too late,’ which Peter Brooks has explained as the longing for a fullness of being of an earlier, still-sacred universe, time and timing become all important” (18). See Williams, “Melodrama Revisited.”

⁴⁴ In interviews with Jon Halliday in *Sirk on Sirk: Conversations with Jon Halliday*, Sirk has admitted that although he did not remember much about *All that Heaven Allows*, “I do recall the following influences on me ... One of the first of all American literary impacts on my thinking, when I was thirteen or fourteen, was a book my father gave me: *Walden* by Thoreau. This is ultimately what the film was about—but no one recognized it, except the head of the studio, Mr. Muhl ... The picture is about the antithesis of Thoreau’s qualified Rousseauism and established American society” (113-4). See Douglas Sirk and Jon Halliday, *Sirk on Sirk: Interviews with Jon Halliday* (New York: Viking Press, 1972).

⁴⁵ Lance Newman, “Thoreau’s National Community and Utopian Socialism,” *American Literature* 75.3 (2003): 3.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.: 17. Leo Marx in *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* has emphasized the importance of craft and art to this transformation. He has read the emphasis on self-transformation not so much as an intermediate step in the

Machine in the Garden that Thoreau's criticism of New England society is moralistic, and not political.⁴⁹ Echoing this view, Lance Newman has said that, "Thoreau ... focused, again, on the importance of ethical regeneration, of programs for the moral reform of a backslidden elite ... The object of concern here is not the working class but the potentially salvageable bourgeois slave-driver of himself, who single-mindedly pursues material wealth."⁵⁰

It is worth noting that while *All that Heaven Allows* strategically "disappears" the urban space, the white working class, and the African-American—figures whose reproach of consumer society cannot be contained by a merely ethical critique of the spiritual poverty of the elite—the hope for this society, which, as Jon Halliday said, "ha[d] lost touch with its ideals" was embodied in the figure of the diasporic immigrant. Perhaps this is not surprising, considering that Sirk himself was an émigré from Germany.

At a certain point in the film, a procession of happy, ostensibly petit bourgeois subjects parade in to party with Ron and Cary at Ron's friends' rural cottage. Each partygoer is introduced to Cary with a reference to his or her vocation: we have the beekeeper who moonlights as an "artist"; we have the bird-watcher and Audubon society volunteer; we have the plump, stubbly Mexican fisherman⁵¹ and his Spanish-speaking wife and daughter.⁵² The residents of Ron's idyllic pre-modern utopia are self-employed, and have an unalienated relationship to their own labor as well as to nature (figure 26).

transformation of society as it is itself compensatory. See Leo Marx, *The Machine in the Garden : Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁴⁹ According to Leo Marx: "It is not the material or social conditions of life, it is not capitalism, that in his [Thoreau's] view accounts for the quiet desperation felt by the mass of men: it is their own spiritual inertia" (quoted in Newman 17). See Newman, "Thoreau's National Community and Utopian Socialism."

⁵⁰ Ibid.: 10.

⁵¹ The fisherman's accent in English sounds more like that of a native speaker of Italian than of Spanish, but his wife unmistakably speaks a few words in Spanish: "*Que bonita* [of Cary]. *Tanto gusto. Mi hija, Margarita.*" Some scholars, such as Judith Mayne, have thought them to be Italian. See Judith Mayne, "Fassbinder and Spectatorship," *New German Critique* 12 (1977): 69.

⁵² It is worth noting that there was a sharp rise in Latino immigration, particularly Mexican immigration, to the United States during the 1950s as a result of the new demand for immigrant labor following World War II. Bracero programs, in effect from 1942 to 1947 and from 1951 to 1964, brought Mexican laborers to do seasonal agricultural work in the United States.

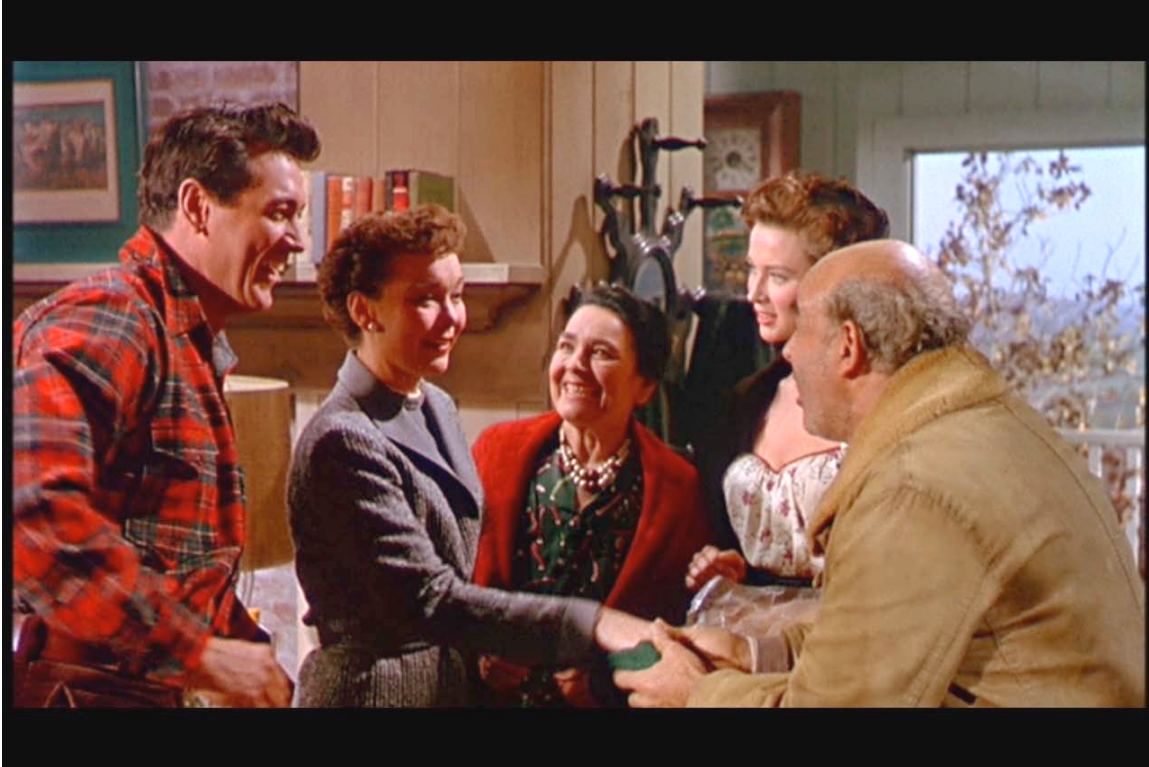


Figure 26. Cary (Jane Wyman) is introduced to Ron's (Rock Hudson) friends in Douglas Sirk's *All that Heaven Allows* (Universal, 1955): they include an immigrant lobsterman (Nestor Paiva) and his family (Rosa Turich and Gia Scala).

But what could the immigrant have to do with Ron and his Thoreauvian ideals? The presence of immigrants that share the Thoreauvian worldview at the Anderson party might seem somewhat anomalous. Thoreau and the transcendentalists were notoriously unenthusiastic about the influx of Irish immigrants to New England in their day: they were certainly not addressing their injunctions to these newly integrated members of the working class.

On the other hand, one might think that the figure of the immigrant, unlike the native wageworker and the victims of internal colonialism (the Native American and the African American), has a certain structural affinity with Ron's position. First, like Ron, the immigrant in some sense has agency; after all he *chooses* to emigrate. Second, as a consequence of uneven and combined development—especially relevant in the case of the immigrant from the so-called Third World—the immigrant often leaves behind an agrarian,

semi-feudal way of life where he had an unalienated relationship to his labor and experienced a sense of genuine community association.⁵³ He has not been formed *within* industrial society (though he is perhaps inadvertently its victim) and knows nothing (yet) of the stultifying rhythms of alienated labor on the factory circuit or of the anomie of modern urban life. So *it might seem* that the immigrant has bypassed the socialization of his American contemporaries and carries within himself a consciousness corresponding to an agrarian past that is the source of all that is good and virtuous. Best of all, he brings those “old-fashioned values” into the American present, into the future maybe, with his geographic migration. He is the only one that can be said naturally and directly to bear the past’s glorious imprint in the space of the American present. And he is ubiquitous—a figure whose presence has been constitutive of the nation since the beginning. It might seem that the immigrant is in fact the perfect audience for Ron’s lessons; just as it might seem that the native wage laborer is a hopeless case—one without the requisite agency (the choices) necessary for such demonstrations of virtue (as Ron’s), and missing a countervailing tradition, history, experience with which to contest the spiritually-backward American elite. Here we have a kind of romantic anti-capitalist rendition of the American dream.⁵⁴

IV

Ali: Fear Eats the Soul,⁵⁵ in presenting a cross-ethnic worker solidarity, ultimately inverts *All that Heaven Allows*, which it reads as depicting not a cross-class solidarity, but rather the alliance of petit bourgeoisie and haut bourgeoisie sanctioned by an ideology of individualism. Fassbinder’s film recuperates the absences of the Sirk text: the urban space, the working class, and the racial minority. *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* copies neither the

⁵³ According to the law of uneven development, neocolonialism impoverishes and distorts the culture and development of the colonies. The law of combined development accounts for the internal underdevelopment that accompanies these neocolonial relations. This is a situation in which “advanced” techniques and relations of production make their way into the neocolonies and exist side-by-side with (semi)feudalistic techniques and relations of production.

⁵⁴ This was the term Lukács used to refer to a pervasive late 17th century European trend that both registered the desolation of capitalism while looking back to a precapitalist time for cultural values worth rescuing. See Löwy, “Naphta or Settembrini? Lukács and Romantic Anticapitalism.”

⁵⁵ The German title is *Angst essen Seele auf*, which means, roughly, “fear eats the soul.” In German, this line is ungrammatical, presumably trying to mimic the speech of a nonnative speaker of German. The U.S. title is “Ali: Fear Eats the Soul.” This may reflect the working title of the film, which was “*Alle Türken heißen Ali*” (“All Turks are Named Ali”). Most scholars writing in English refer to the film as “Fear Eats the Soul,” which has the disadvantage of not reflecting the grammatical error. I will refer to it here by the U.S. title, which is not a perfect solution either, but has the advantage of suggesting the way the name and character of “Ali” function allegorically in the film.

discourse nor quite the story of *All that Heaven Allows*. In some sense, it updates the Sirk film, setting the action in another place (Munich) and in a time (contemporaneous with its making; 1970s). The relationship between a much older, widowed cleaning woman and a younger man is central, though their age difference is more stark, and a racial element is added: Ali (El Hedi ben Salem) is a “guest worker,” Moroccan and black; he is referred to both as “auslander [foreigner]” and “schwarz [black man].”⁵⁶ As in the earlier Sirk film, the woman, Emmi (Brigitte Mira), is ostracized by her family and community.

The mechanism of the remake is central to the internal structure of *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*. The film is divided into two parts: the first part is a disavowal of *All that Heaven Allows*; the second part is a remake of the first. The two parts are separated in the story by a “vacation” that is not represented in the plot; they are separated on-screen by an enigmatic scene in an outdoor café.

The three-minute scene opens and closes with an extreme long shot of Ali and Emmi sitting across from each other at a yellow table; they are surrounded by dozens of similar tables and chairs, all of them empty (figure 27). Apparently they are the only patrons and entirely alone except for a small crowd of café staff staring at the couple from a nearby doorway. The dialogue closely follows the dialogue in *All that Heaven Allows* between Cary and her daughter, Kay, as Kay confesses that she cares what others think of her despite her own better judgment. Kay’s disclosure deeply impacts her mother, who decides she cannot marry Ron because the marriage will adversely affect those around her. Emmi, for her part, wet from the rain and weeping, lays her head on the table and tells Ali that she cannot tolerate being rejected by the community: “I am so happy yet I can hardly stand it, the way people hate us ... If only you and I were alone in the world.” This last line encapsulates the theme of the first part of the film: the fallacy of a love that is “alone in the world.” In the face of their troubles, Emmi proposes that they take a vacation, and go “somewhere where no one will stare at us.” “When we get back,” she says, “it will all be different. Everyone will be nice to us.” Her prophecy is fulfilled in the second part of the film. When the couple returns from vacation, there is a marked

⁵⁶ I recognize that “guest worker” (*gastarbeiter* in German) is a contested term used to refer to the hundreds of thousands of foreign workers recruited by the Federal Republic of Germany during the so-called economic miracle following World War II. The obvious irony of this misnomer is that guests, by definition, do not work for their hosts. Rita C. K. Chin, “Imagining a German Multiculturalism: Aras Oren and the Contested Meanings of the ‘Guest Worker,’ 1955-1980,” *Radical History Review* 83, Spring (2002). Hereafter, I will be using this term without quotations, though in some sense I mean them.

change in people's attitude. People are, literally, *nice* to them: Ali goes from being a pariah to being sought after and admired.



Figure 27. The scene that separates the two parts of *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (1974): Emmi (Brigitte Mira) and Ali (El Hedi ben Salem) decide to go on vacation.

The problematic of the first part of *Ali*—coming to terms with a love that is *not* alone in the world—reaches its culmination in the enigmatic café scene, but it first emerges in a conversation between Emmi and her coworkers. They are discussing the situation of a German woman who married a Turkish guest worker. The coworkers are disparaging the woman and rationalizing her subsequent alienation from the community. Responding to her coworkers, Emmi says of the married German woman, “Maybe she needs no one else, if he [her Turkish husband] speaks to her.” To which her coworker replies, “No one can live without others.

No one, Emmi.” The question of the autonomy of romantic love is raised here and will echo throughout the first part of *Ali*. Emmi suffers the same fate as the German woman under discussion.

The plot of the first part of the film depicts Ali and Emmi’s first meeting and their subsequent social rejection. Emmi becomes more and more isolated from the social alliances of her former life: first, her neighbors find the building suddenly dirty since Ali has moved in; then her coworker refuses to shake Ali’s hand or even to recognize Emmi’s presence during lunch hour; then, her son kicks in her television and disowns her; then the neighborhood’s petit bourgeois grocer refuses to serve Ali until he “learns” German. At the end of this first part of *Ali*, Emmi is broken, confessing that her coworker was right—the autonomy of romantic love is illusory; no one can live without others. The second part of the film then explains the nature of this dependence. While the film opens with Emmi suspended in space and time, unattached, alone in a zone of depoliticized individuality, it ends by situating her in a class context.

When Emmi and Ali return from their vacation, the scenarios of the first part of the film replay but with a difference. This difference is best exemplified by the scene that immediately follows the conversation between Ali and Emmi in the café. The petit bourgeois shopkeeper, in an exchange with his wife, reverses his position toward Emmi and Ali under the pressures of the growing dominance of the supermarket in German society.

Wife: Anton, don’t forget she was a good customer ...Just walk out and say hello and everything will be fine ... She’ll shop here again.

Anton: I suppose I’d better, now most of them shop at the supermarket ... You’re right: one can’t be too particular in business.

His insight—that he’d better be nice to them—follows from the requirements of his shop: discrimination is bad in business. The petit bourgeois shopkeeper is being edged out by the indiscriminating vehicles of mass consumption such as the supermarket. In the face of such pressures, the shopkeeper recognizes Emmi and Ali as the consumers that they are and that the supermarket understands them to be. The reference to the supermarket marks the transition to a late stage of capitalism (i.e. multinational capitalism), as did the arrival of the television and Ned’s new job at a multinational corporation in *All that Heaven Allows*.

The shopkeeper's logic unfolds throughout the second part of the film, in which the relations between Emmi and her neighbors, family, and coworkers confirm this market logic. Her relationships with others are shown to be determined, in the last analysis, not by predilection, or taste, or a distorted sense of decency and morality, but by need. The shopkeeper needs Emmi's business; her son Bruno (Peter Gauhe) needs her to babysit his daughter while his wife works; her neighbor needs her storage space; her coworkers need her cooperation in order to effectively petition their employer for a raise. And at Ali's place of employment, when Emmi is ridiculed by his workmates ("Is this your grandmother from Morocco?"), she confesses not that she loves Ali, but that she needs him ("I need you ... I need you so much")—the old washerwoman needs the guest worker, just as the guest worker needs the washerwoman.

The coincident change of attitude in the community as a whole toward Emmi and Ali that marks the second part of the film is not explained within the diegesis. The structural repetition in the plot seems incomprehensible at the level of the story: how can it be that over the period of a "vacation," the community's attitude changes so dramatically and simultaneously? Such changes in attitude would seem to require decades, perhaps centuries. In the U.S., for example, it took decades to transition from a society characterized by segregation, discrimination, and under-representation to one that projects an image of multiracial bliss in the realm of representation while still suffering from stark racial inequality. *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* begins by modeling the first kind of society (Ali is mistreated and reviled by various segments of the society) and ends by modeling the second (Ali becomes attractive, sought after, commodified). But this stark change cannot be explained temporally within the narrative; after all, the couple was only away for a short period, a worker's vacation. Yet, this is what the use of the formal strategy of the internal remake accomplishes: it condenses time. In *Ali*, the unrepresented "vacation" achieves this condensation.

This narrative break constituted by the phantom vacation of fifty years cannot withstand the plausibility requirements of realism, just as in *All that Heaven Allows* Ron's fall functions as a *deus ex machina*. In both cases, these narrative breaks should be read metaphorically; they signal temporal breaks. In *All that Heaven Allows*, the fall further confirms that Ron's ideal world belongs to a mythic pastoral past before modernity: Cary's time and Ron's may be contiguous in spatial terms, but they do not share the same

temporal frame. Similarly, in *Ali*, the time before the vacation and after seems to correspond to two distinct historical moments. The two films are distinguished by their differing judgments about that historical past. In *All that Heaven Allows*, we said the judgment was nostalgic: the corrupt present is compared unfavorably to the glorious past. In *Ali*, the discrimination of the pre-vacation past does not appear worse than the fetishization of the post-vacation present: neither past nor present escape negative judgment.

The remake mechanism at work within the film is what allows us to see this: the second part of *Ali* remakes the first part (in precisely the way *Far from Heaven* remakes *All that Heaven Allows*), setting it in the same time and place, but adjusting its story content. The adjustment to the story turns out to be the contemporary face of racism. Because in *Ali*, the passage of time (a mere worker's vacation) cannot justify the change in attitude (i.e., the realization that discriminatory practices do not pay), the film suggests that the new attitude does not represent an advance or progress or moral epiphany, but rather, a new incarnation of the original offense. The racism Ali suffers in the first part of the film is hardly worse than the racism of the second part. Sure, "everyone is nice," but it becomes clear the problem was never a matter of "niceness" versus "meanness," but of something more fundamental. The internal remake is a useful formal strategy for undermining the commonly held view that it is "progress" or "evolution" or "moral awakening" that accounts for the changes in the treatment of minorities; the mechanism governing change is shown to be the adjustments capitalism makes necessary. The mode of production is the culprit, while the treatment of the guest worker is a superstructural reverberation. Ali's actual situation is little changed from the beginning of the film to the end. Whether he is rejected or fetishized, his circumstance is little improved; he is exploited and oppressed all the same. And this reality of exploitation Ali shares with Emmi.

In offering an economic explanation of the situation of the guest worker in Germany, *Ali* links the struggle of the black guest worker to that of the white charwoman; they are presented as aligned subjects of historical agency (figure 28).⁵⁷ The film may therefore be read as a look at the challenges of uniting a proletariat fractured by race, culture, and the unexorcised fascism of the German working class. The starkly

⁵⁷ Another example of this emphasis on the economic may be seen in the drama of the new Yugoslav worker at Emmi's job. Emmi's coworkers exclude this new worker from their wage negotiations because they worry she will jeopardize their chances at a raise.

visible age difference between Brigitte Mira (Emmi) and El Hedi Ben Salem (Ali)—significantly exaggerated from Sirk’s Wyman and Hudson—underscores the nature of their attraction. Faced with the postmenopausal Mira’s age-worn visage, it is infeasible to understand the Emmi-Ali union in terms of traditional romance and individual love-object predilections. This couple cannot withstand a reading that casts their relationship as one founded on “love at first sight,” as the diegesis seems to suggest. This cliché depends on the view that desire is autonomous, spontaneous, and not itself socially produced. But *Ali* suggests that even the couple’s “love” is socially determined, and inexplicable without reference to their structurally analogous social positions in the society.

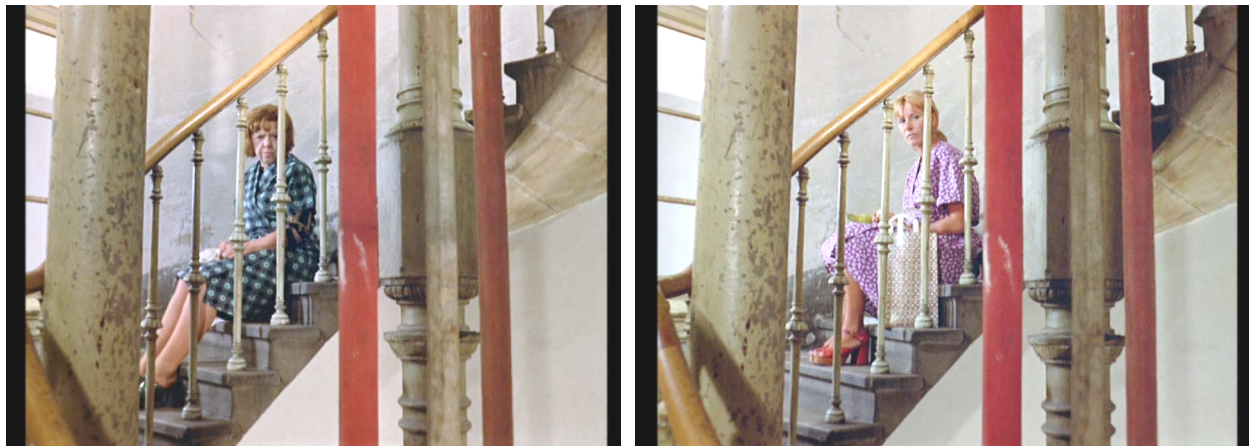


Figure 28. Repetition with a difference. *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (1974)
In the second part of Rainer Werner Fassbinder’s *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul* (New Yorker, 1974), Yolanda (Helga Ballhaus), a Yugoslav guest worker who earns less than her German coworkers, is framed sitting along on the stairs, much as Emmi is earlier in the film.

Thus, the dialogue between Emmi and Ali on the dance floor in the penultimate sequence of the film must be read allegorically. Ali and Emmi are dancing at the Asphalt Pub to the same music they danced to upon first meeting.

A: Me sleep with other women.

E: That doesn’t matter, Ali. Not at all.

A: I no want, but all the time nervous.

E: You're your own master; you can do what you like. I know how old I am; I see myself in the mirror. I can't tell you what not to do ... but when we're together we must be nice to each other. Otherwise life isn't worth living.

A: I want no other woman, only love you.

E: I love you too. Together we're strong ...

The conflict between ethnic guest worker and German proletariat is what is being dramatized in the relationship between Ali and Emmi. Another clue to this allegorical reading is Ali's own name, which is, of course, not "Ali" but "El Hedi Ben Salem." The use of "Ali" suggests that this character is a kind of ethnic guestworker everyman.⁵⁸

More support for an allegorical reading involves Barbara (Barbara Valentin), the blond proprietor of the Asphalt Pub. At one point, Emmi has ordered a cola, and the blond delivers the cola, adding nonchalantly but *a propos* of nothing, "By the way, I'm the owner." The admission is puzzling because it is narratively unmotivated. Why is this detail here? The relationship that Ali begins with Barbara serves as a foil to his relationship with Emmi. The pub owner is young, blond, and clearly designated a petit bourgeois. She is happy to serve guest workers in her pub, offers a postmodern array of Arab and "German" music on the pub's jukebox, and is eager to make couscous for Ali whenever he comes to visit her. Emmi, by contrast, is an older worker and a former member of the Nazi party. Thoroughly depoliticized, she is excited to celebrate her wedding dinner at an Italian "Osteria" that, she proudly reports, Hitler frequented between 1929 and 1933; and she refuses to make couscous, reproving Ali, "In Germany people don't eat couscous." Ali turns to the pub owner each time Emmi erupts; the first time on the question of couscous, and the second time when Emmi and her workmates admire his physique in the third person as if he were being priced on an auction block—"what soft skin he has," they say as they circle him, fingering his muscles. When Ali becomes

⁵⁸ In light of this, it is interesting that *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul's* working title was "*Alle Türken heißen Ali*" ("All Turks are Named Ali"), suggesting that 1) Ali's experience is generalizable; and 2) Turks are in effect both "auslander" (foreigners) and "schwarz" (black). Relevant as well is the fact that Ali is North African and not Turkish, while in 1973, the top three guest-worker nationalities, in order, were Turkish, Italian, and Yugoslav. If one of the film's objectives is to generalize Ali's experience, why not make Ali typical rather than exceptional? Why invite the confusion of race with nationality? This complexity is precisely what is on display when the characters interchange "foreigner" and "black" in their discourse.

disturbed by the scene, Emmi, by way of explanation, tells her friends, again in third person, “He has his moods; that’s his foreign mentality.”

Each of these episodes is followed by an encounter with Barbara, the blond couscous-peddling bar owner. The encounters are explicitly staged as exchanges: the offer of couscous (“I’ll put the pan on” the blond says eagerly to Ali) precedes a sexual tableaux depicting the pub owner as she comes to collect her fee. But the pub owner’s willingness to exchange couscous for sex suggests the film’s understanding of the role of culture in worker solidarity. As Ali turns from Emmi’s unexorcized fascism, he encounters in the pub owner a relationship characterized by sheer commodity exchange: couscous (with all its symbolic cultural content) for sex. What appears, on the face of it, to be her cultural tolerance (and Ali seems drawn into this view initially) is explicitly cast by the film’s structure, its use of juxtaposition, as exploitation. Like the petit bourgeois grocer, the pub owner is concerned with her bottom line. Culture is not sacred here; it, too, can be co-opted, repackaged, and sold. If it takes couscous, give him couscous. Ali flees from Emmi’s latent fascism, only to face a more sophisticated predator. But in the pub owner’s hands, couscous is evacuated of the affective content Ali associates with it—North African identity, history, tradition, and culture; couscous becomes merely a unit of exchange. It is the pub owner’s disclosure of her class status that aligns her with the grocery owner. It also explains Ali’s eventual repudiation of Barbara, when he tells Emmi as they dance “I want no other woman, only love you.” To which Emmi replies, “Together we are strong ...” suggesting the necessity of an interethnic alliance against capitalist exploitation and its superstructural reverberation, racism.

It is true, of course, that as soon as Emmi says, “Together we are strong,” Ali collapses on the dance floor and must be hospitalized for a stomach ulcer. His collapse and hospitalization act as a qualifier that acknowledges the specificity of racial oppression without undermining the necessity of an interethnic proletariat alliance. To the degree that Emmi’s subjectivity is socially determined, so is Ali affected by the social context. The impact of the outside on Ali is registered by his hospitalization from an ulcer. The barrier to cross-ethnic worker solidarity is twofold: the non-ethnic German worker must exorcise fascistic habits of thought to become politicized and the guest worker must maintain health. That the guest worker experience

of racism in Germany penetrates to the literal core of his being—his stomach—suggests the urgency of the situation.⁵⁹

The final hospital scene in *Ali* articulates a relation between race and class in which racism is cast as a threat to the organism, to life itself. In some sense, racism emerges as primary, trumping everything else: without life (and a compromised digestion jeopardizes the most basic requirement for life), there is no chance for worker alliance. This is the predicament, clearly recapitulated at the end of the film: racism endangers the very cross-ethnic solidarity that will spell racism's demise.

For Thomas Elsaesser, Fassbinder takes a distinctly anti-identity-politics stance:

What makes the depiction of oppressors and oppressed in his films ultimately so difficult for some audiences is that Fassbinder refuses to assume that there has to be a natural solidarity between victims. Instead, one finds an almost Buñuelian vision of the right of outcasts and underdogs to be as mean, inhuman and evil as anyone else. His portrayal of the victims of society shows what has made them who they are, giving rise to a picture of cruelty among the underclass which reflects but cannot explain the cruelty of the dominant class. The decision of not judging his characters from an external vantage point thus obliges him not to be partisan toward marginal groups solely on the basis of being marginal.⁶⁰

What Elsaesser describes is a cinema in which victims *both* suffer *and* do not behave virtuously. In Fassbinder, suffering by itself is not enough to establish virtue. If the melodramatic mode's use of suffering as proof of virtue is assimilable to precisely "partisan[ship] toward marginal groups solely on the basis of being marginal (i.e. victimized)," then it is this equivalence between suffering and virtue that Fassbinder refuses by interjecting the counterweight of the victim's own cruelty. To put it in Linda Williams's terms, this is

⁵⁹ The ulcer, and even the doctor's prognosis, come straight out of Frantz Fanon's *Wretched of the Earth*. In the chapter on "Colonial War and Mental Disorders," Fanon understands the prevalence of the stomach ulcer in Algerian men in similarly social terms, as a psychosomatic disorder broadly caused by the "pathology of atmosphere" that accompanied the Algerian war. On the question of treatment, Fanon prescribes, "As a general rule, we never advise surgical intervention. A gastrectomy was performed on two occasions, and in these two same cases a second intervention was necessary in the same year as the first" (291). See Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth.

⁶⁰ Thomas Elsaesser, *Fassbinder's Germany : History, Identity, Subject*, Film Culture in Transition (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1996) 30.

melodrama without victim-heroes: suffering does not establish moral virtue and moral virtue, and moral virtue is never misrecognized because it is beside the point.

Thomas Elsaesser calls this a “non-judgmental relation to destructive or evil characters”⁶¹; Fassbinder has called it “indulgence [toward characters] to the point of irresponsibility.”⁶² This nonjudgmental stance is what makes *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*’s critique of the social world political and not moralistic, like that of *All that Heaven Allows*. The point is not that Fassbinder’s characters are unvirtuous, rotten, contradictory, misguided, and that if they could only be made aware, they would change and would begin to make the right life choices. Rather, we have here a situation in which the dominant ideology is internalized and lived out daily by everyone, in one way or another. The utopian moment in Fassbinder does not rest with the virtuous individual activist who imagines himself impervious to ideology, who imagines that he can change the world by his acts of individual resistance and by his choice to live his own life (like Ron) *as though* conditions were ideal. Nor is the utopian moment to be found in the depiction of a mythic past as in *All that Heaven Allows*. The utopian dimension for Fassbinder is, as Elsaesser has pointed out, embodied by the characters that, though admittedly not virtuous, take “the ‘system’ literally, which is to say, by believing in equality, love, generosity, trust.”⁶³

In *Ali*, the dance scene is simultaneously a moment of victim solidarity and the embodiment of the film’s utopian drive. That this victims’ solidarity collapses by the film’s end makes the impulse toward solidarity no less desirable or ideal. The point is that solidarity is not “natural”; it is something to be sought, but something that does not depend on the virtuousness of its seekers. The film shows the necessity of class-consciousness, even if it presents, without illusions, the obstacles to its realization.⁶⁴

⁶¹ Ibid. 29.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid. 40.

⁶⁴In “Reading Fassbinder’s Sexual Politics,” Richard Dyer has argued that several of Fassbinder’s films (including *Ali*) exemplify a problematic political perspective, what Walter Benjamin called “left-wing melancholy.” This term refers to a quietist leftist stance characterized by both a recognition of the desolation of capitalism and a refusal of the real world possibilities of collectivity, political mobilization, and social transformation. For Dyer, left-wing melancholy “does not see the working class as the agent of historical change—instead it stresses the working class as the victim of capitalist society and/or as hopelessly complicit in its own oppression” (177). Surely the working class can be a victim of capitalist society, complicit in its own oppression, *and also* the agent of historical change. What is certainly the case in Fassbinder is that successful political action is not depicted. But in *Ali*, there is a clearly marked class solidarity that is decidedly not a politics of identity. See Richard Dyer, *The Culture of Queers* (London ; New York: Routledge, 2002).

V

Far from Heaven is set in 1957, at the time of the Little Rock desegregation struggle, in an insular New Haven, Connecticut, suburb. Cathy (Julianne Moore) and Frank Whitaker (Dennis Quaid) are the unhappily married couple featured in advertisements for Frank's television company, Magnatech. Their marriage unravels as Frank has affairs with men and Cathy begins a "friendship" with Raymond Deagen (Dennis Haysbert), her African American gardener.

In "The Politics of Disappointment: Todd Haynes Rewrites Douglas Sirk," Sharon Willis finds that "it is the moments of referential 'breakthrough,' those instances where the film incorporates contemporary social issues of race and sexuality, that remain problematic and that trouble—or disappoint—the film's logic."⁶⁵ The logic to which Willis here refers, and which she claims is "disappoint[ed]," consists primarily of the structural analogy between racism and homophobia, established by the film's visual organization.⁶⁶ The idea is that there is a "symmetry within its [the film's] architecture between racial and sexual oppression, bringing together the violent repressions of both racial mobility and sexual choice."⁶⁷ Willis duly observes the stark differences in the representation of Raymond and Frank's positions. Raymond is hypervisible, surveilled continuously by the white community, while Frank remains invisible, until he enters a gay zone. Raymond is deprived of a point of view and never depicted without Cathy, while Frank is granted a point of view in scenes that do not include Cathy. Raymond is featured in an interracial relationship devoid of erotics, while Frank is featured in the only sexually charged scene in the film—between him and a young man on vacation with his family. Raymond suffers the worst fate of the film when he must sell his business and leave town, while Frank can keep his corporate job and his new relationship. Willis concludes from this that "Race ... is *displaced* into the interracial bond and *replaced* by the white-black couple. Thus, the film's 'racial angle' fades into a white perspective of fascination with the ongoing mystery of a black world elsewhere."⁶⁸ In other

⁶⁵ Willis, "The Politics of Disappointment: Todd Haynes Rewrites Douglas Sirk," 162.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*: 168.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*: 158.

words, the film, by refusing Raymond black subjectivity—"a black world elsewhere"—turns race into a floating signifier that eventually attaches itself to the interracial bond, leaving the question of black identity unanswered.

Willis presupposes that the structural symmetry clearly established between racism and homophobia in *Far from Heaven* is an instance of analogy rather than of disanalogy.⁶⁹ She takes for granted that the objects of racism and homophobia—the black man and the gay man—are analogous subjects in an alliance against heteronormative, mainstream American society: this is her starting point. So when these figures are represented in such starkly different terms, the only possible conclusion is that the film disappoints its own logic. But perhaps the film never accepted the logic that Willis ascribes to it. Willis's text overlooks the possibility that *Far from Heaven* might be interested in the difference between racial and sexual identity, rather than their similarity. In fact, *Far from Heaven* is questioning the coalition of "others." Rather than disappoint its own efforts at liberal multiculturalism, it is pointing to the political impotence of identity politics—in which political activity is organized around the interests of particular groups that are united on the basis of a shared social identity such as race, ethnicity, religion, gender, or sexual orientation, rather than around policy issues or class. And thus, it refuses the consolation of a political alliance of oppressed, politicized identities joined by a "chain of equivalences."

In one scene that closely follows *All that Heaven Allows*, Cathy and Raymond are talking outside of her house. Raymond tells Cathy three important things about himself that unsettle her expectations: 1) he is a responsible father raising a daughter alone ("Well I guess between Pa's business, my shop, and looking after my little girl, there's not much time for reflecting"); 2) he owns a plant shop in town ("It's just a little place, down on Hawthorne. Started out as a service for gardeners, ordering plants and fertilizer. Till I opened the store. 'Bout six years ago. The only thing that business degree's been good for yet"); and 3) he has a business degree. This information is close to what Ron Kirby established in his first meeting with Cary, and amounts

⁶⁹ For a similar stance, see James Morrison, "Introduction," *The Cinema of Todd Haynes : All That Heaven Allows*, ed. James Morrison (London ; New York: Wallflower, 2007). By contrast, Laura Mulvey, takes the view that the film is pointing to a disanalogy: "At first *Far from Heaven* might seem to suggest that these two social oppressions [racism and homophobia] are equal and parallel in intensity, but as the plot unfolds social anxiety at homosexuality is shown to be infinitely less deep rooted than the hysteria caused by intimacy across the racial divide" (41). See Mulvey, "Review."

to a corrective (as it did in Sirk's film)—namely, “I am not what I seem.” In Ron Kirby's case, the coded message is that Kirby is not really a wage-laboring gardener, but a petit bourgeois businessman; in Raymond Deagan's case, the message is that race and class are extricable terms, that the only thing that separates Cathy from him is skin color. In their exchange, race becomes literally just a matter of skin color, divorced from any indicators of economic oppression or cultural content. And it is only when Cathy understands Raymond's difference to be quite literally “the color of his skin” that the “friendship” can commence, just as in *All That Heaven Allows* the barrier to Ron and Cary's relationship is overcome when Cary learns the “truth” about Ron's class status (i.e., that he is not a wage worker). In the remake, racial difference is reduced to its “essential” truth—it depends, in the last analysis, on “skin color,” not on culture or class. Hence this scene reproduces the cliché of colorblindness that is undermined throughout the film.⁷⁰

The cliché of colorblindness is primarily undermined in the scene in which Cathy breaks off her relationship with Raymond.

Cathy: It just isn't plausible, Raymond, for me to be friends with you. You've been so very kind. To me. And I've been perfectly reckless and foolish in return ...thinking—

Raymond: *What?* That one person could reach out to another? Take an interest in another? And that maybe, for one fleeting instance, could manage to see beyond the surface—beyond the color of things?

Cathy: Do you think we ever really do? See beyond those things? The surface of things?

Raymond: “Just beyond that fall of grace/Behold that shining place.” Yes, I do. I don't really have a choice.

Cathy: I wish I could ... You're so beautiful.

⁷⁰ The cliché is reinforced by the casting of Dennis Haysbert as Raymond. Haysbert played Clay Arlington in the 1993 black-and-white thriller-allegory of American race relations, *Suture* (Siegel and McGhee). In the film's diegesis, Haysbert is the identical half-brother of white actor Michael Harris. Within the film's diegesis, the two are supposed to look identical. Of course, from the spectator's perspective, they could not look more different: the one is black, tall, and strong, the other is white and scrawny. For a thorough treatment of the use of cliché in Haynes's oeuvre, see Marcia Landy, “Storytelling and Information in Todd Haynes' Films,” *The Cinema of Todd Haynes: All That Heaven Allows*, ed. James Morrison (London: Wallflower Press, 2007).

Raymond advances the cliché of colorblindness (managing “to see beyond the surface”) that has determined Cathy’s actions until now, only to have Cathy, in good postmodern fashion, suddenly refuse this opposition of depth and surface, essence and appearance, declaring, instead, the reign of appearance.⁷¹ This disavowal of depth mirrors the film’s own disavowal of what some have argued is the film’s “archeological” project of recuperating the actual fifties buried beneath the glossy images of its own representations. The scene discussed above would suggest the film’s acknowledgement of the impossibility of such a project—in other words, the impossibility of archeology, of getting at the “actual” fifties, of recuperating the past itself.⁷²

The difficulties of representing the historical past have much in common with the difficulties of representing difference. What does Raymond imagine that Cathy would see beyond the surface of things? An individuated self? Shared humanity? “[A] black world elsewhere”? In that all of these would constitute a “depth” beyond the surface of things, the view that this “black world elsewhere” is what remains a mystery in the film just reconfirms *Far from Heaven*’s postmodern refusal of the concept of essence. In refusing colorblindness as a solution to the problem of racism, *Far from Heaven* refuses two things: 1) black subjectivity based in culture and history, and 2) the superficiality of appearance or surface; instead embracing a black subjectivity shaped exclusively by the experience of discrimination.

Black culture, tradition, history are entirely missing from *Far from Heaven*; “blackness” has no positive content, it is purely negative, demarcated by racism. “[A] black world elsewhere” is indeed absent. There are allusions to such a world: for example, when Cathy reenters the house after first meeting Raymond, Sybil, Cathy’s African American maid, casts Raymond a meaningful look, clearly flagged as such by the film’s discourse. But the film gives us no sense of the content of Sybil’s look; it functions as an empty signifier.⁷³ The result is that black subjectivity based on a shared culture, a concept that relies on an essentialist notion of

⁷¹ Fredric Jameson considers this new depthlessness a symptom of postmodernism. See Jameson, Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.

⁷² In “The Filmmaker’s Experience: Question and Answer with Todd Haynes and Julianne Moore” (included in the DVD supplemental materials), Haynes says that many people have asked directly if the “message” of his movie is summed up by Raymond’s line about getting beneath the surface of things, to which he has replied, “It’s the contrary. Everything in this film is on the surface.”

⁷³ An analog to this in *All that Heaven Allows* is the moment when Cary becomes paranoid about the whisper and subsequent laugh exchanged by Ron and Mick in Cary’s presence. But while in *All that Heaven Allows*, we learn the content of the exchange—it turns out that Ron had just commented to Mick about Cary’s legs—in *Far from Heaven* we do not. There is a secret that Raymond and Sybil share by virtue of being black. Sharon Willis has commented on this. See Willis, “The Politics of Disappointment: Todd Haynes Rewrites Douglas Sirk.”

depth, is called into question. Whereas in *Ali*, culture and tradition—couscous and Arabic music—are shown, and shown to be easily co-opted, in *Far from Heaven*, they are simply ignored.

While *Far from Heaven* may have little use for a specific black consciousness, it does have a political understanding of race. In the scene discussed above, in which Cathy tells Raymond on a public street that there is no seeing beyond the surface of things, a white man from across the street interrupts, “You! Boy! Hands off!” The seriousness of the surface of things is thus underlined. And it is the surface of things that will ultimately determine Raymond’s fate. To say that there is nothing “beyond” the surface of things is not to retreat to superficiality.⁷⁴

This moment of interpellation—“You! Boy! Hands off!”—is an illustration of what Frantz Fanon calls the “fact of blackness.”⁷⁵ Fanon rejects a conception of black subjectivity in which it is either a mere means to class consciousness (as one finds in Sartre) or an expression of a shared history or culture (as one finds in negritude). Instead, Fanon posits a black consciousness based in experience. The “fact of blackness” is a moment of interpellation—a child saying to his mother: “Look, a Negro!” Fanon complains: “Jean-Paul Sartre had forgotten that the Negro suffers in his body quite differently than the white man.”⁷⁶ And so, in Fanon, “the regime of the look” is installed at the heart of the race problematic:

All the same, the Jew can be unknown in his Jewishness. He is not wholly what he is. One hopes, one waits. His actions, his behavior are the final determinant. He is a white man, and, apart from some very debatable characteristics, he can sometimes go unnoticed. He belongs to the race of those who since the beginning of time have never known cannibalism. What an idea, to eat one’s father! Granted, the Jews are harassed—what am I thinking of? They are hunted down, exterminated, cremated. But these are little family quarrels. The Jew is disliked from the moment he is tracked down. But in my case everything takes on a new

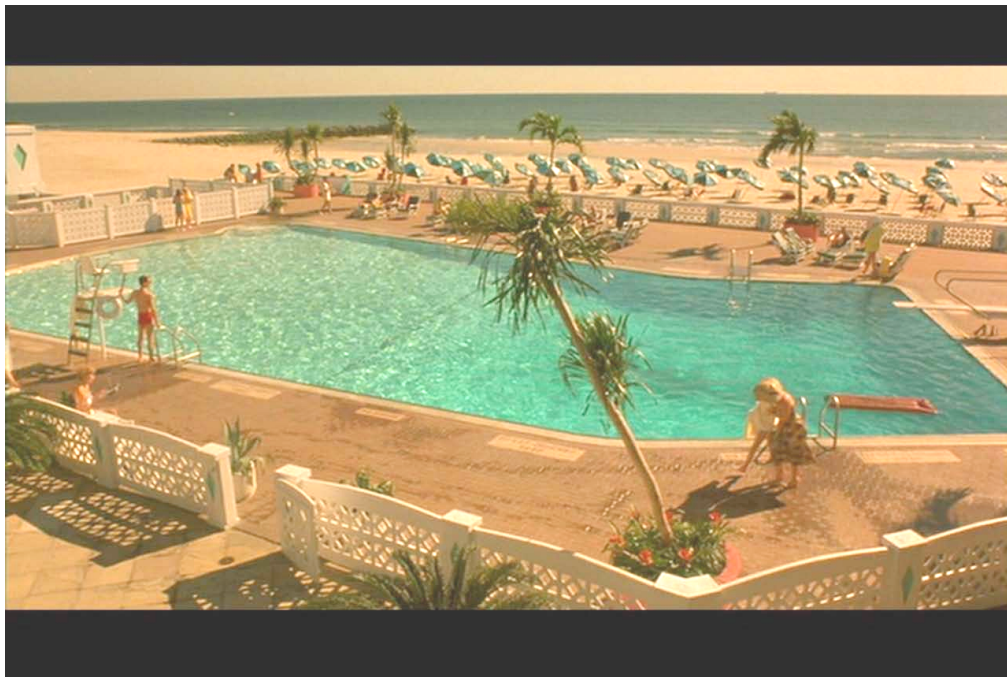
⁷⁴ For an alternative account of “surface” in the film, see Celeste-Marie Bernier, “‘Beyond the Surface of Things’: Race, Representation and the Fina Arts in *Far from Heaven*,” *The Cinema of Todd Haynes: All That Heaven Allows*, ed. James Morrison (London: Wallflower, 2007).

⁷⁵ Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*.

⁷⁶ Ibid. 138.

guise. I am given no chance. I am overdetermined from without. I am the slave not of the 'idea' that others have of me but of my own appearance.⁷⁷

Far from Heaven draws a similar distinction in its representation of the hypervisibility of Raymond (a racialized subject) and the relative invisibility of Frank (figure 29). The idea of being a slave of one's own appearance is present in the film's view that surface—appearance, the visible—is indispensable for any account of racism. To be discriminated against on the basis of appearance is not an incidental feature of racism; it is the heart of the matter.



**Figure 29. “Overdetermination from without.” *Far from Heaven* (Focus Features, 2002).
An empty pool evacuated after a black child has touched the water.**

According to Fanon, “overdetermination from without” is a worse condition than any other. *Far from Heaven* echoes this judgment. In its juxtaposition of racism and homosexuality, *Far from Heaven* shows how much Raymond’s hypervisibility impacts his prospects for economic mobility and love. Willis observes:

⁷⁷ Ibid. 115.

“While Frank is expelled from his family and from heteronormativity, and Cathy is expelled from suburban wifely normalcy, neither ends up as bereft as Raymond. He is literally pushed off the film’s map, and off his own map as well, since, by his account, he has never even been to Baltimore,”⁷⁸ Raymond’s status as a petit bourgeois business owner is untenable. The difference that defines him—hypervisibility—fares worse in the world than the invisibility of the closet.⁷⁹ Frank, at least, can maintain his executive job with the television corporation. It may be true that Frank is exiled—airbrushed from the image of domestic normativity peddled by Magnatech—yet still, his livelihood is not jeopardized by his identity as Raymond’s is. With these differing fates, the absent term, “class,” makes its appearance: while Frank continues to be identified with the corporate giant Magnatech, it is suggested that Raymond, expelled from the petit bourgeois class, must begin to sell his labor power for wages in Baltimore. The oppression that Raymond is shown to suffer is, in the film’s last analysis, economic.

In *Far from Heaven* the three identity categories—race, gender, sexuality—so clearly designated by the film’s structure, ultimately fail to come together in a “rainbow coalition” (figure 30).⁸⁰ By film’s end, the characters representing these categories, which today are the politicized identities of identity politics, each go their separate ways and suffer different fates alone. Although only Raymond emerges as wholly innocent and virtuous, they are all presented as victims. I have been arguing that by calling attention to the differences in the fates of these characters, the film undermines the view that beneath it all there is a common interest among these identities, that there is a “chain of equivalences” that could form the basis of an alliance.⁸¹

⁷⁸ Willis, “Politics of Disappointment,” p. 168.

⁷⁹ The film also suggests the life possibilities of gay characters that are out-of-the-closet. An example of this would be the inclusion of Mona Lauder’s uncle, Morris Farnsworth, “the hotshot art dealer from New York,” who snickers, with the socialites, at Cathy and Raymond in the art gallery scene. He is explicitly designated a gay character. Farnsworth is out of the closet, embraced by the group, and sees no common cause with Raymond.

⁸⁰ And perhaps to this failed coalition we can add the figure of the Latino immigrant. There is an anomalous moment at the end of the film that depicts a new gardener at work in Cathy’s yard. For a few frames, we can see that this gardener is neither black nor white; he has a long ponytail of straight, black hair and could be Latino, evoking ongoing “conflicts” between immigrants (mainly from Latin America) and African Americans around employment displacement and competition for low-wage jobs—yet another reminder of a highly fractured “rainbow coalition.”

⁸¹ I use this phrase in the way that Slavoj Žižek does in his convincing critique of multiculturalism and the arguments of Laclau and Mouffe (*Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*) in “Multiculturalism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism.” Connecting identity politics with coalition politics, Žižek writes, “And is not a homologous utopia at work in the notion of a ‘rainbow coalition’: in the idea that, at some utopian future moment, all ‘progressive’ struggles—for gay and lesbian rights, for the rights of ethnic and religious minorities, the ecological struggle, the feminist struggle, and so on—will be united in a ‘chain of equivalences’? Again, this necessity of failure is structural: the point is not simply that, because of the empirical complexity of the situation, all particular ‘progressive’

Moreover, the film's account of the failure of such an alliance is not to be explained away by the diegetic time of the film: identity politics was not around in 1957. The disappointment of the alliance applies to political life in the contemporary moment. For Haynes is interested in how racial identity and sexual identity strain the social order in fundamentally different ways. At most, in positioning the characters in a hierarchy of material well being by the film's end, Haynes's film suggests that certain forms of oppression—racism, for example—are social ills that require, in Nancy Fraser's language, redistribution as well as recognition, while others like homophobia require only demands for recognition.⁸²

fight will never be united, that 'wrong' chains of equivalences will always occur—say, the enchainment of the fight for African-American ethnic identity with patriarchal and homophobic ideology—but rather the emergencies of 'wrong' enchainments are grounded in the very structuring principle of today's 'progressive' politics of establishing 'chains of equivalences': the very domain of the multitude of particular struggles with their continuously shifting displacements and condensations is sustained by the 'repression' of the key role of economic struggle—the leftist politics of the 'chains of equivalences' among the plurality of struggles is strictly correlative to the silent abandonment of the analysis of capitalism as a global economic system and to the acceptance of capitalist economic relations as the unquestionable framework" (47). See Žižek, "Multiculturalism, or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism." For other critiques of identity politics, see also Reed, Stirrings in the Jug : Black Politics in the Post-Segregation Era; Jameson, Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism; E. San Juan, Racism and Cultural Studies : Critiques of Multiculturalist Ideology and the Politics of Difference, New Americanists (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002); Brown, States of Injury : Power and Freedom in Late Modernity; Michaels, The Trouble with Diversity : How We Learned to Love Identity and Ignore Inequality.

⁸² Nancy Fraser actually argues that "justice today requires *both* redistribution *and* recognition" and that "the task is to devise a 'bivalent' conception of justice that can accommodate both defensible claims for social equality and defensible claims for recognition of difference" (5). She designates certain collectivities—such as race and gender—as "bivalent collectivities" that "suffer both socioeconomic maldistribution and cultural misrecognition" (15) and others—like sexuality—as collectivities whose suffering is ultimately caused by "the status order, not the economic structure of capitalist society" (21). Still, heterosexist injustice does result in some economic harm, thus redistributive justice is demanded in that case as well, according to Fraser. See Nancy Fraser, "Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation," The Tanner Lectures in Human Values (Stanford University: 1996), vol.



Figure 30. Neither black nor white. *Far from Heaven* (Focus Features, 2002).
Cathy's new, ethnically ambiguous gardener.

Like Fassbinder, Haynes takes an anti-identity politics stance, but unlike Fassbinder, he does not posit the ultimate desirability of an alliance based on a shared class interest. In contrast to *Ali* and *All that Heaven Allows*, *Far from Heaven* refuses to name capitalism in its indictment. *Far from Heaven's* characters suffer oppression at the hands of social conventions that belong to a certain period in American history; they are not shown to be linked to the economic organization of society. While the film suggests some of the affective dimensions of oppression, it fails to diagnose its sources; and it declines to envision the contours of a utopian future.

VI

This chapter began from the need to understand *Far From Heaven's* relation to its filmic predecessors and its representation of social injustice. I have already discussed the ways in which the film and its predecessors engage with identity politics. This final section discusses how *Far from Heaven's* banal depiction of social

exclusion and intolerance, and especially racism, reflects a critical engagement with melodrama. In particular, I will argue that just as the film disavows identity politics, it also disavows the melodramatic mode. In doing so, *Far From Heaven* raises the question whether the melodramatic mode is capable of representing the social injustices of today.

Having considered identity politics in melodrama, we should also consider the melodrama of identity politics.⁸³ In *States of Injury: Freedom*, Wendy Brown analyzes the structure of desire of the politicized identities of identity politics in terms of Nietzsche's concept of *ressentiment*—"the moralizing revenge of the powerless."⁸⁴ For politicized identities, the suffering that is the cause of *ressentiment* depends upon the exclusion from liberalism's universal ideal subject—white, masculine, and middle-class. Politicized identities gauge their social injury by this ideal's rights and privileges (e.g., educational and career opportunities, protection from hate crimes, the possibility of upward mobility in return for "hard work").⁸⁵ So while politicized identities present themselves as self-affirming, in fact, they depend for their existence as identities on the very ideal (bourgeois, white, male) whose universality they must deny, but end up reinscribing. Like Nietzsche's vengeful slave, politicized identity deals not in political action, but in a "moralizing politics." Satisfied with its moral superiority, politicized identity is committed to nothing but its own powerlessness.⁸⁶ This is shown by the fact that identity politics fights its battles for the limited goals of legal rights and social acceptance.⁸⁷ According to Brown,

When social "hurt" is conveyed to the law for resolution, political ground is ceded to moral and juridical ground. Social injury... becomes that which is "unacceptable" and "individually culpable" rather than that which symptomatizes deep political distress in a culture; injury is thereby rendered intentional and individual, politics is reduced to

⁸³ See also Lauren Berlant, "The Subject of True Feeling: Pain, Privacy, and Publics," *Cultural Studies and Political Theory*, ed. Jodi Dean (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000).

⁸⁴ Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* 68.

⁸⁵ Ibid. 59.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid. 60.

punishment, and justice is equated with such punishment on the one hand and with protection by the courts on the other.⁸⁸

In Brown's view, the juridical focus of identity politics precludes a fundamental attack on capitalism, the structure that is ultimately responsible for social injury.

Linda Williams has suggested that the melodramatic mode is the formal complement of identity politics.⁸⁹ Like identity politics, the melodramatic mode speaks in the moralizing language of social injury, individual blame, and exclusion; it demands rights and recognition from the state and its citizenry. In melodrama, as in identity politics, virtue is equated with suffering; and victims, because they are victims, occupy the moral high ground.⁹⁰ Moreover, the melodramatic mode and identity politics are both are predictable by-products of liberalism.

It is no surprise, then, that *Far From Heaven* should distance itself from the melodramatic mode as much as it does from identity politics. Most critics have taken for granted that *Far From Heaven* is unproblematically a melodrama, citing the emotion it reliably engenders in its viewers.⁹¹ But we must think carefully about the film's relation to the melodramatic mode. Christine Gledhill has emphasized that in order for the melodramatic mode to deliver moral legibility in a post-sacred world, it also "must conform to realism's ever shifting criteria of relevance and credibility, for it has power only on the premises of a recognizable, socially constructed world."⁹² "As the terms of this world shift so must the recognition of its changing audiences be continually resolicited."⁹³

Melodrama draws on realism in two ways. First, melodrama employs the filmic conventions that at a given historical moment look like realism. For example, Williams points to D.W. Griffith's frequently

⁸⁸ Ibid. 27.

⁸⁹ Williams, *Playing the Race Card : Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson* 24,43.

⁹⁰ For this account of melodrama, see Ibid; Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination : Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*; Christine Gledhill, "Rethinking Genre," *Reinventing Film Studies*, eds. Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (London: Arnold, 2000).

⁹¹ See, for example, Richard Dyer, *Pastiche* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Taubin, "In Every Dream House.," Richard Falcon, "Magnificent Obsession," *Sight and Sound* 13.3.

⁹² Christine Gledhill, "The Melodramatic Field," *Home Is Where the Heart Is : Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film*, ed. Christine Gledhill (London: BFI Pub., 1987) 37.

⁹³ Ibid.

discussed storm sequence in *Way Down East*, which was filmed outdoors on a real river in a real blizzard, as one that, by incorporating a realistic background achieved heightened melodramatic effects in its time.⁹⁴ As the filmic conventions of realism change over time, melodrama must draw on these modernizing trends in order to continue to deliver moral legibility.

The second way that melodrama draws on realism is by adjusting to the shifting signs of what Gledhill prefers to call “cultural verisimilitude” or, roughly, contemporary public opinion on cultural and social issues, the reigning consensus on “reality.”⁹⁵ Using the example of Victorian melodrama, Gledhill argues that “[A]s the socio-political formations and psychic identities of class and gender—on which Victorian melodrama depended—break free from the ideologies and representations that sustained them, the codes of verisimilitude are challenged. With successive working-class, feminist, and civil rights movements, a reflexive self-consciousness invades an increasingly media-mediated culture: struggles to redefine cultural verisimilitude under the banner of realism follow.”⁹⁶ In order to maintain this cultural verisimilitude in the face of an audiences’ changing experience of its situation, melodrama must adapt itself to the new consensus. It must present a constellation of moral dilemmas that the audience accepts as relevant to its own situation. So understood, melodrama is a peculiarly contemporary form, not because its narratives are always set in the present (they often are not), but because of “the genuine turmoil and timeliness of the issues it takes up,”⁹⁷ and because of the currency of the filmic conventions it employs. It is therefore little wonder that it has been the preferred mode in which American culture has addressed the social problems of everyday life.

If we take seriously the account of melodrama put forward by Williams and Gledhill, we are forced to conclude that *Far from Heaven* is not straight-forwardly a melodrama: it does not deliver moral legibility

⁹⁴ Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson* 37.

⁹⁵ Gledhill, “Rethinking Genre,” 236. “Cultural verisimilitude” was coined by Todorov and applied to film by Steve Neale. For Neale, “verisimilitude” should not be used as a synonym for “realism” or “authenticity” as he accuses Gledhill of doing because according to Todorov, “the verisimilar is not a relation between discourse and its referent (the relation to truth), but between discourse and what readers believe is true” (118-119). See Steve Neale, “Questions of Genre,” *Screen* 31.1 (1990); Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1977).

⁹⁶ Gledhill, “Rethinking Genre,” 236.

⁹⁷ Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson* 18.

precisely because it does not draw on realism in the ways discussed above.⁹⁸ First, it does not update its use of filmic conventions: even acting styles and scripts mimic the conventions of the past. More importantly, it lacks culturally verisimilitude. In its treatment of social issues—segregation, the taboo on interracial relationships, the isolation of the stay-at-home-mother, a medical establishment that treats homosexuality as a disease—it fails to be timely. This is not merely because the film is set in the past and its discourse has been scrupulously designed to imitate 1950's styles of filmmaking. Certainly there is a long tradition of historical melodramas that provide timely moral lessons. Rather, *Far from Heaven's* untimeliness owes to the fact that its moral lessons—its clichéd brand of antiracism, its injunctions to tolerance and inclusion of “others”—belong to the past as well.⁹⁹ That was a time when the United States was, in the words of George Fredrickson, an “overtly racist regime,”¹⁰⁰ when the battles for rights and recognition from the state was a live one, when discrimination by individuals looked like both cause and effect of social inequality and injustice, when legal segregation was the paradigmatic form of intolerance. The public consensus on these issues has undeniably shifted, although we may still feel dissatisfied with the current state of things.

Today, after rapid industrialization and urbanization, after the American Civil Right Movement, after the Women's Movement, and the Gay Liberation Movement, it is undeniable that the character and forms of racism, sexism, and homophobia have changed. And the public consensus on these social maladies has changed as well. For instance, the racism of today cannot be neatly summed up by the paradigm of state-

⁹⁸ James Morrison in “Todd Haynes in Theory and Practice” considers the film a “postmodern melodrama.” Recognizing the paradox of such a designation, Morrison nonetheless argues that Haynes's films are melodramas to the extent that they take very seriously their character's emotions. See James Morrison, “Todd Haynes in Theory and Practice,” *The Cinema of Todd Haynes: All That Heaven Allows*, ed. James Morrison (London: Wallflower, 2007).

⁹⁹ What I am calling the film's untimeliness, others prefer to read as the film's pervasive self-consciously camp sensibility. For this reading, see Morrison, “Introduction.” Citing the camp appropriations of Sirk films, Barbara Klinger has noted that the mass camp sensibility “thrives ... on outdatedness” and melodrama, because it depends for its effects so much on the contemporary social context and filmic conventions, is particularly apt to seem outdated as the social landscape changes, and thus, readily available for camp appropriation. See Klinger, *Melodrama and Meaning: History, Culture, and the Films of Douglas Sirk*. One could perhaps argue that the film itself inscribes a camp mode of reception common to contemporary viewers encounters with classic Hollywood melodramas. Rejecting the notion of an incongruence between timeliness and campiness, some commentators have tried to emphasize both the film's campiness and its “timely” treatment of social issues. James Morrison writes, “In its purest form, camp is the retrograde aesthetic style of a self-consciously closeted gay sensibility, and Haynes adopts it wholeheartedly to suggest that the destiny of the closet is by no means a thing of the past” (3). By contrast, Klinger and Susan Sontag treatments of camp suggest the close relation between camp and moral irrelevance. See Susan Sontag, *Against Interpretation, and Other Essays* (New York: Dell, 1966).

¹⁰⁰ In *Racism: A Short History*, George Fredrickson considers the ideal type of the “overtly racist regime” to have been exemplified by the American South at the height of Jim Crow, in South Africa during apartheid, and in Nazi Germany. See Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History*.

sanctioned discrimination of yesterday. Nevertheless, we know racial inequality exists; we only have to refer to any index of non-white well-being—from wealth to education to health to rates of incarceration—to confirm a gnawing sense that all is not well in American democracy. Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva has argued that the 1950's marked a crucial break between the Jim Crow period of race relations and the post-civil rights era of the new racism.¹⁰¹ While the Jim Crow era was characterized by overt racism and a strongly held and voiced belief in minority intellectual and moral inferiority, the new racism of today—buttressed by the ideology of color blindness, which eschews the explicit mention of race, believing that “racialized patterns of social inequality that do persist are outcomes of individual and/or group-level cultural deficiency”¹⁰²—is “subtle, institutional, and apparently nonracial”;¹⁰³ it is a “racism without racists.”¹⁰⁴ The sort of exclusion depicted in *Far from Heaven* is not of this variety.

So it is bewildering when production designer Mark Friedberg says in *Anatomy of Scene*, a Sundance Channel production that is included in *Far from Heaven's* DVD supplementary materials: “Even though this seems like such a dated way of telling stories, many of the social issues that it addresses are still with us, very strongly so.”¹⁰⁵ In fact, the social issues treated in the film are not with us. When commentators defend the contemporaneity of the moral of lessons of the film (against those who have argued that the film is a “corpse”),¹⁰⁶ we have to wonder what it is that is affecting them so.

One thing is clear: it is not what affected Fassbinder when he famously wrote about the scene in *Imitation of Life* when Sarah Jane begs her mother, Annie—who has followed her daughter across the country trying to reconcile her to her race—to leave her alone, to just allow her pass for white: “The cruelty [of the scene] is that we can understand them both, both are right and no one will be able to help them. Unless we

¹⁰¹ Bonilla-Silva, *White Supremacy and Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era*. The phrase “the new racism” has been used by other writers, including Martin Barker, Paul Gilroy, and Stuart Hall, to mean something similar but more specific: namely, “culturalism” or “a way of thinking about difference that reifies and essentializes culture rather than genetic endowment, or in other words make culture do the work of race” (141). See Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History*.

¹⁰² Tyrone Forman, “Color-Blind Racism and Racial Indifference: The Role of Racial Apathy in Facilitating Enduring Inequalities,” *The Changing Terrain of Race and Ethnicity*, eds. Maria Krysan and Amanda Lewis (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2001) 45.

¹⁰³ Bonilla-Silva, *Racism without Racists: Color-Blind Racism and the Persistence of Racial Inequality in the United States* 3.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Echoing this sentiment, Pam Cook has written, “*Far from Heaven's* retrospective look at the 1950's imagines a scenario in which the lives of its characters could have been different, and it is all the more poignant in light of the knowledge that while some things may have changed, many remain the same” (15). See Cook, *Screening the Past: Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema*.

¹⁰⁶ Stuart Klawans, “Heaven Can Wait,” *The Nation* 275.18 (2002).

change the world. At this point, all of us in the cinema wept because changing the world is so difficult.”¹⁰⁷ What is striking in his account is the way in which he reaches outside the text of the film. The pathos produced by *Imitation of Life* owes in his account to the recognition of the gap between the way things are and the way they should be, not only in the diegetic world of the film, but in the world outside the representation, in the world he was inhabiting (or at least, in his perception of that world). In other words, the effect was achieved by some correspondence between the world represented in the film and the world outside its frame. Williams concurs, putting it this way: “[M]elodrama is structured upon a ‘dual recognition’ of how things are and how they should be,”¹⁰⁸ of the gap between desire and reality. Tears are produced when this conflict gets resolved, when desire is finally disappointed.¹⁰⁹ Williams herself reaches outside the text as she reminds us of melodrama’s dependence on cultural verisimilitude for its effects. In order to provide moral legibility in a morally ambiguous world, melodrama must at least *seem* timely. The situation we are faced with in *Far from Heaven* is not like the one Fassbinder described in *Imitation of Life*: the social ills of *Far from Heaven*’s diegetic world and their attendant moral lessons (e.g., tolerance and color-blindness) have been assimilated—the audience inhabits the changed world and so what engenders emotion cannot possibly be the realization that “changing the world is so difficult.”¹¹⁰

If, as I have suggested, the source of affect in *Far from Heaven* cannot be attributed to melodrama, then how do we account for it? Attempting to reconcile pastiche and emotion, Richard Dyer’s meditations on the source of the film’s affect are revealing:

Some of the intensity of the emotional response to the film feels like a longing for there to be such films and a gratitude for having given us one now in which some of the elements we may stumble over in them (because of changing attitudes and tastes) have been dealt with, but then, just because of the differences, an intensification of regret that such films are not

¹⁰⁷ Douglas Sirk and Lucy Fischer, *Imitation of Life*, Rutgers Films in Print ; V. 16 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1991).

¹⁰⁸ Williams, “Melodrama Revisited,” 41.

¹⁰⁹ Williams, *Playing the Race Card: Melodramas of Black and White from Uncle Tom to O.J. Simpson* 20.

¹¹⁰ Haynes uses this Fassbinder quote in the director’s commentary that accompanies *Far from Heaven* over the penultimate scene as Raymond’s train leaves the station. But oddly, the sentiment does not apply well here.

made. What happens in the film is sad but we may also be sad for there not being films that do sadness like this anymore.¹¹¹

And what is it about this way of “doing sadness” that is so compelling? What is it about such films?

We may begin to address these questions by noting the strange social predicament in which we find ourselves: we know that inequality exists—that the dilemma of race, for example, continues in the American present—while grasping the inadequacy of representing its contemporary forms in the way it has been represented in the past (i.e., melodramatically). The strangeness of this predicament has led some critics to read the film as condescending to the shameful past and basking in the present’s moral superiority.¹¹² Such a reading registers the untimeliness of the social issues presented in the film, but attributes that untimeliness to a presentist arrogance, thus unwittingly assuming the progressive unfolding of history.¹¹³ Instead, I am suggesting that the combination of the untimely representation of the moralistic dimensions of bias, on the one hand, and the inarticulate sense that all is not well in the present, on the other hand, points to the difficulty of understanding and representing contemporary forms of social injustice, and particularly racism. In that case, perhaps the source of *Far from Heaven*’s affect is nostalgia—not nostalgia for the 1950s *per se* or for, as Dyer would have it, the films of that period, but rather, for the moral clarity of a time when unpleasant social realities seemed visible, on the surface of things, and in clear violation of the explicit ideals of American democracy. It is nostalgia for the moral righteousness of the fight for civil and political rights that characterized the era of widespread, socially sanctioned exclusion. In effect, it is nostalgia for the melodramatic approach to social injustice.

¹¹¹ Dyer, *Pastiche* 178. For a discussion of the uncynical combination of pathos and intellectualism, affect and analysis in Haynes’s oeuvre, see Mary Ann Doane, “Pathos and Pathology: The Cinema of Todd Haynes,” *Todd Haynes: A Magificent Obsession*, ed. Amelie Hastie (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005).

¹¹² James Harvey writes in *Film Comment*, “But it’s the movie’s condescension toward the past—unintended but unmistakable—that’s most troublesome ... And in spite of a general level of intelligence and restraint, it goes on feeling that way—an enlightened movie about unenlightened people living in a ludicrous time ... If we (or our predecessors) were so dumb then, should we be feeling so good about today—watching this movie?” (55). See Harvey, “Made in Heaven.”

¹¹³ Pam Cook has argued that, in fact, *Far from Heaven* is questioning “linear progression, and the way we think of social progress and history” (16). See Cook, *Screening the Past : Memory and Nostalgia in Cinema*. And certainly Todd Haynes takes himself to be rejecting progressivist models of history: “When most people see films set in the ‘50s today ... there’s an immediate sense of superiority. It’s all about the myth that as time moves on, we become more progressive...So the ‘50s become a sort of earmark of oppressive politics and climate, which is flattering to us as we look back” (quoted in O’Brien 1). See Geoffrey O’Brien, “Past Perfect--Todd Haynes’ *Far from Heaven*-Interview,” *Art Forum* November 2002 (2002).

Far from Heaven thus forces us to confront the question of whether the melodramatic mode is able to represent the social ills of the present historical conjuncture—ills to which, in the language of Wendy Brown, a “moral and juridical” framework seems increasingly inadequate. Is, for instance, the racial melodrama still capable of delivering moral legibility, when legal segregation has been outlawed, and when explicit social exclusion is universally deemed unacceptable? How does one represent racism melodramatically when racism has shed its melodramatic skin? In other words, I am suggesting that *Far from Heaven* is a film that points to a very political problem that concerns Jameson—namely, fashioning representations of the present.

VII

We are now in a position to take the full measure of *Far from Heaven*'s contemporaneity. On the one hand, by setting the narrative in the same time and place as Sirk's original, and by copying its aesthetics, *Far from Heaven* calls attention to the adjustments it makes to the narrative of *All that Heaven Allows*. The contemporary content of *Far From Heaven* is expressed in the asymmetry of the lives of Frank and Raymond—an asymmetry that invites a consideration of the political possibilities of identity politics. It is the film's structural approach, its juxtaposition of the characters' lives, that engenders a perhaps politically incorrect comparison of their suffering. On the other hand, if we consider the characters situations, not in relation to each other, but in relation to the community's censure, we are struck by the film's dated and moralistic representation of social exclusion. *Far from Heaven*'s approach to prejudice both registers what is satisfying in the moral clarity of melodramatic representations of injustice, and it suggests the need for a new mode of representation, one that is better suited to contemporary forms of oppression.

The latter interest in changing forms of social injustice was prefigured in *Ali: Fear Eats the Soul*. The form of social injustice depicted in the first part of *Ali* is explicitly exclusionary, like that of *All that Heaven Allows* and *Far from Heaven*. But in the second part of *Ali*, where the first part is remade, racism transforms into an opportunistic appropriation of the “other.” Fassbinder identifies the source and unity of these changing forms: it is capitalist society. For its part, *Far from Heaven* recognizes that the social ills of society take on distinct forms at different historical moments, but declines to characterize the peculiar forms of the

present. Nor does it give an account of what, at bottom, ails its suffering characters. *Far from Heaven* thus seems to be a film without hope. In *Ali: Fear East the Soul*, hope depends on the recognition of the shared interests of workers of different races and ethnicities. In *All that Heaven Allows*, hope resides in the pastoral vision of a simple commodity-producing society. But *Far from Heaven* is mired in the nowhere place of “left melancholy”—nostalgic for the galvanizing moral outrage of an activist past, but unable to mount a political strategy for the present, not even in the realm of imagination.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ See Wendy Brown, “Resisting Left Melancholy,” *Boundary 2* 26.3 (1999). For a critique of Fassbinder’s succumbing to left melancholy, see “Reading Fassbinder’s Sexual Politics” in Dyer, *The Culture of Queers*.

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